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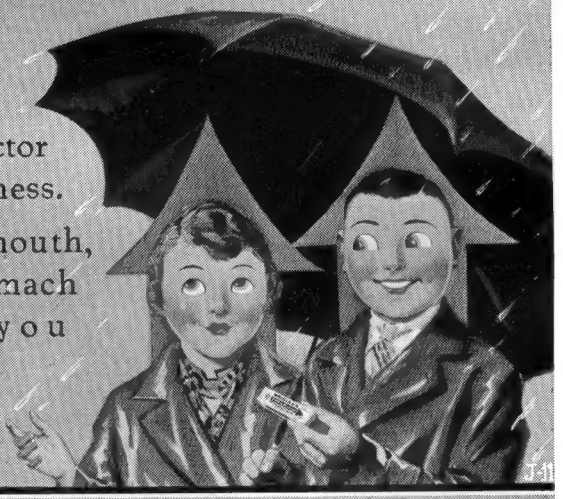

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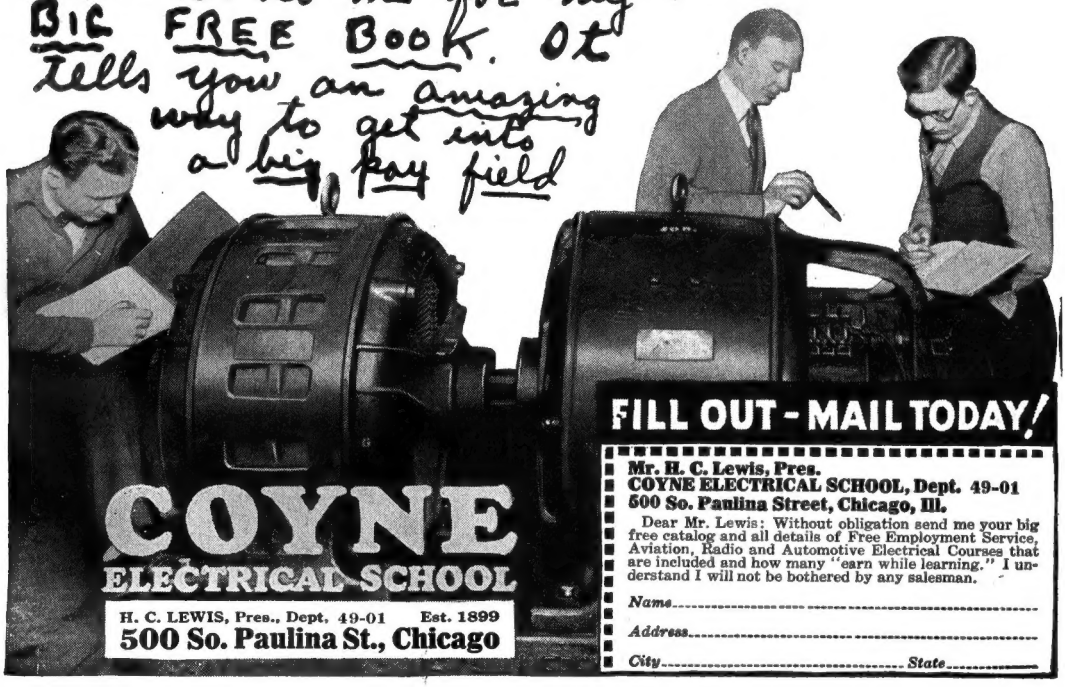

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Volume 70
Number 2

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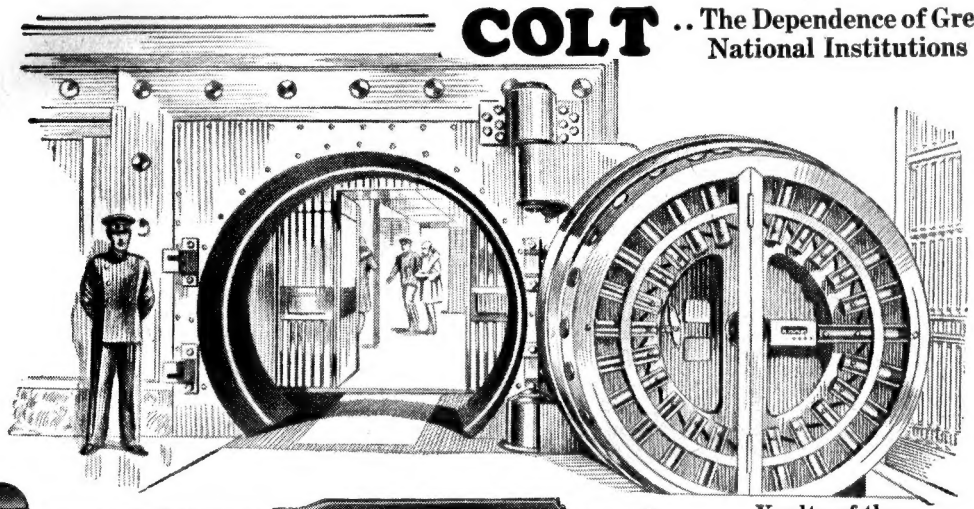

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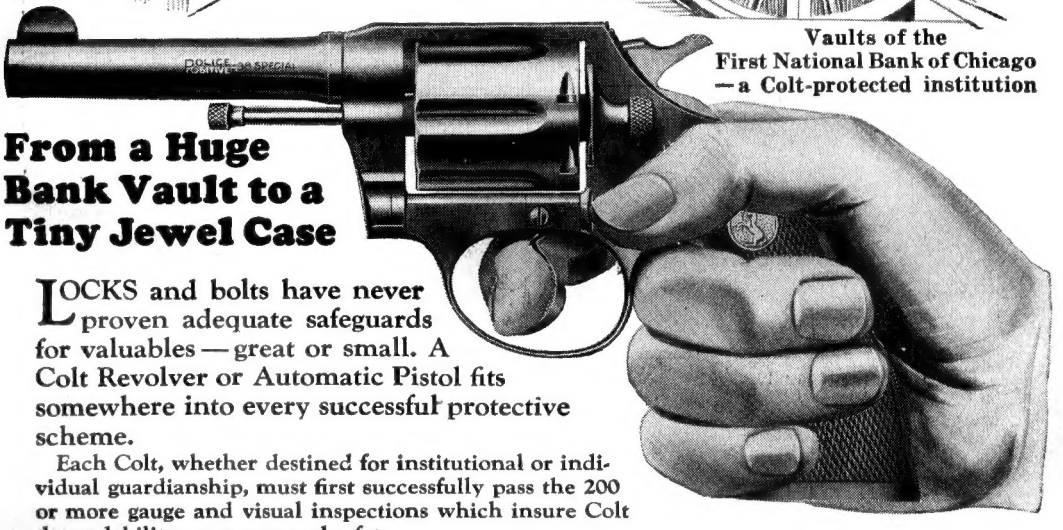

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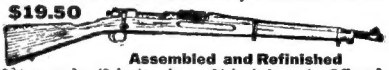

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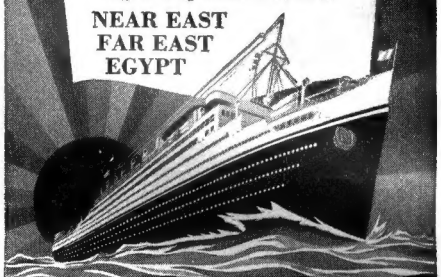

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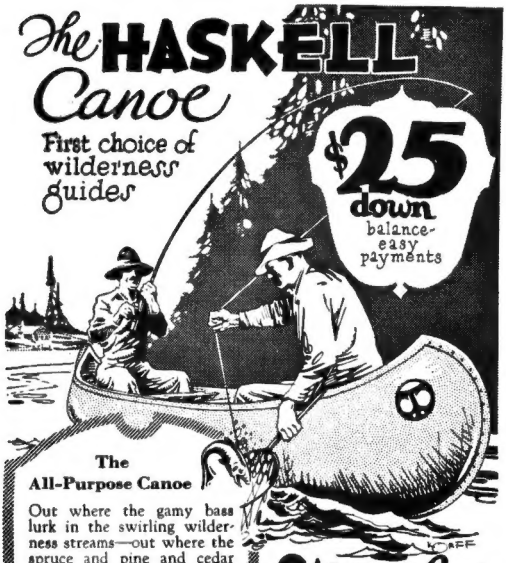

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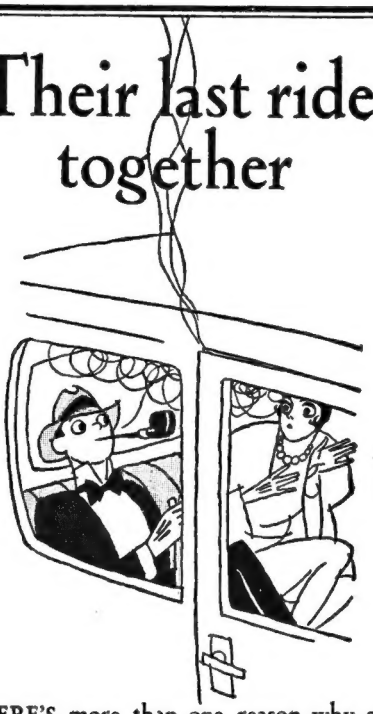

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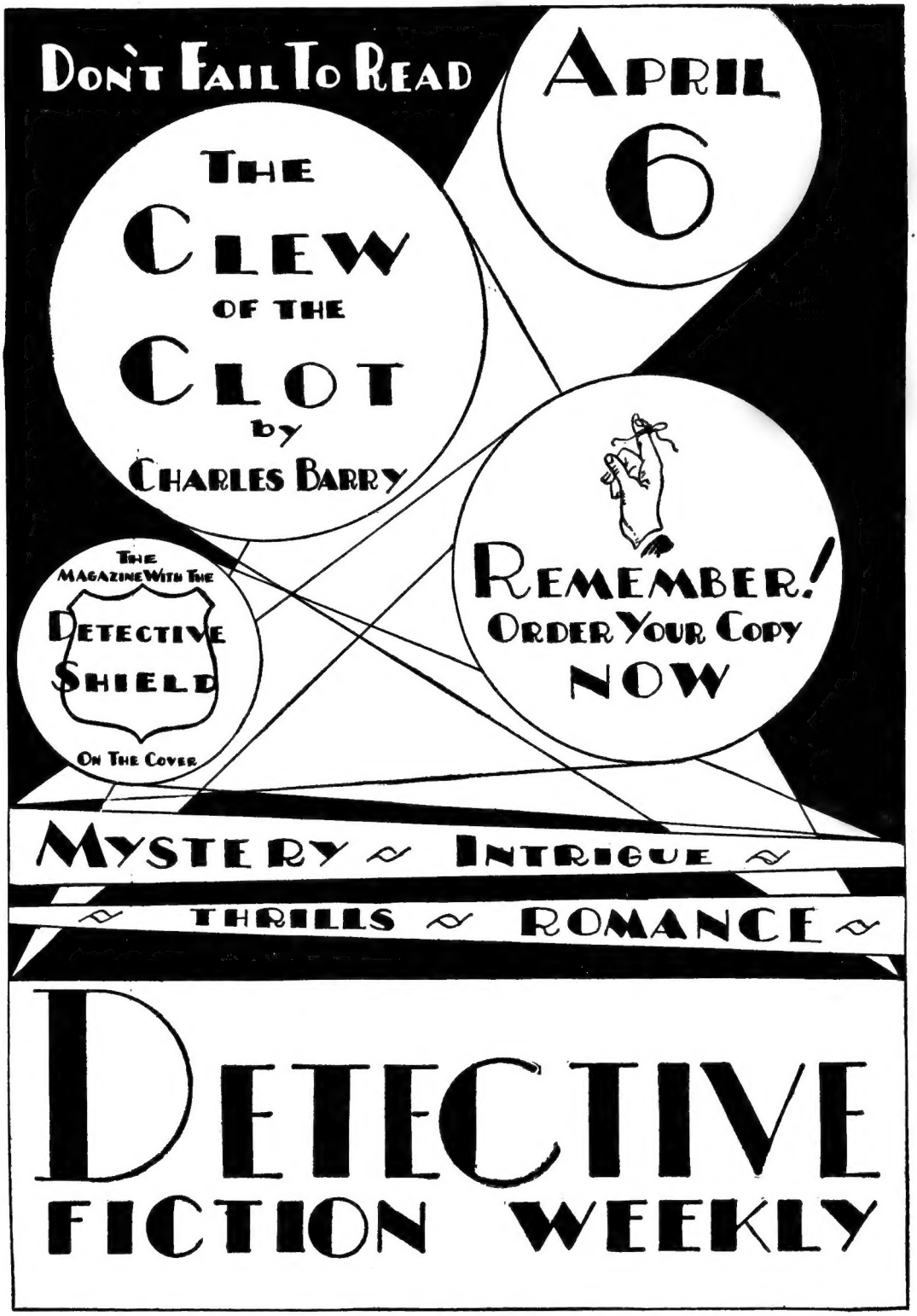
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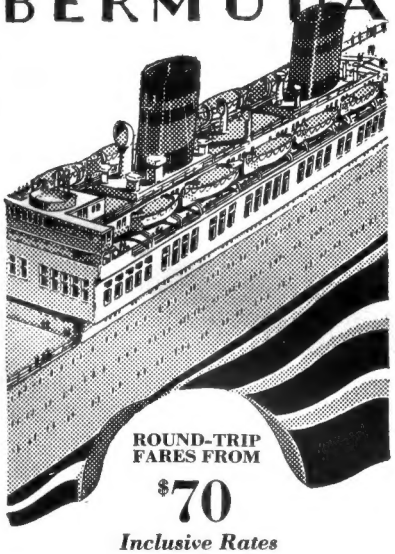

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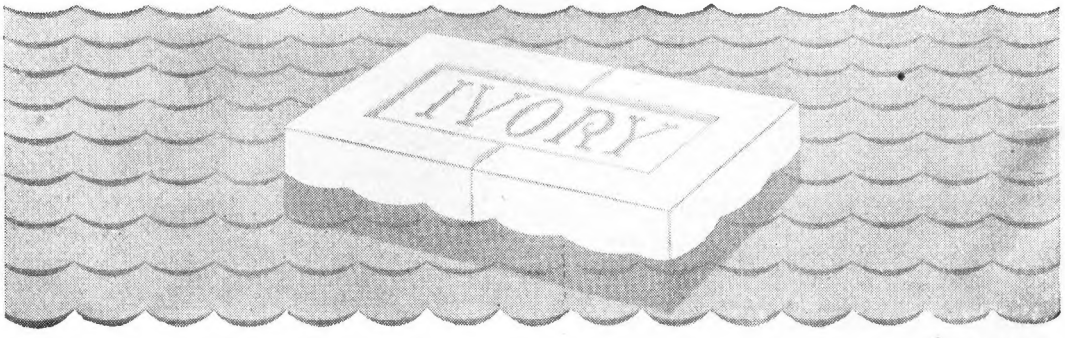

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1929

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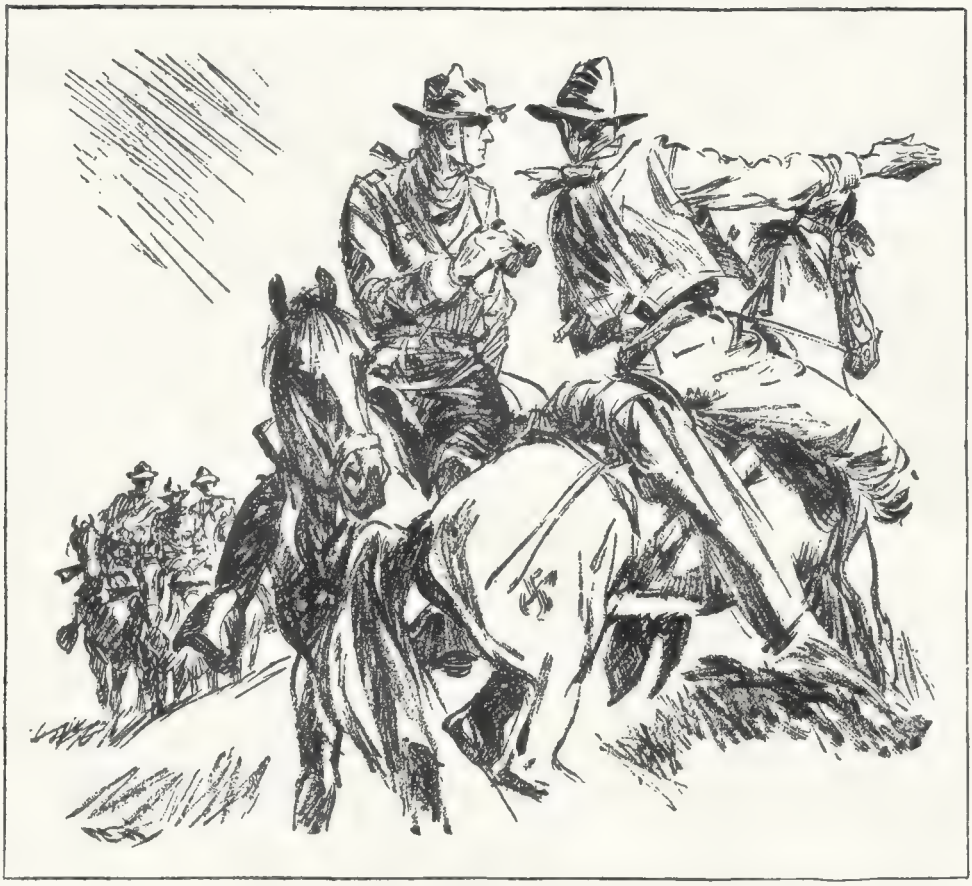


The CORRAL of DEATH

CHAPTER I

A SHAVETAIL AND A SABER

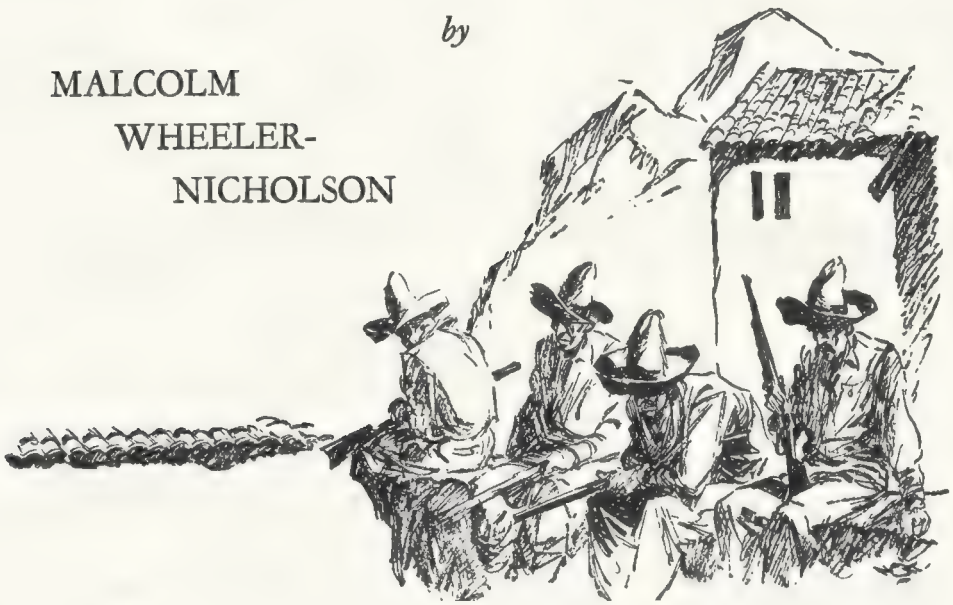
THE LONGER he looked at the closed door the less did he like it. A closed door always harbors something of the unknown and the mysterious. From behind this particular one he could hear a high pitched and querulous voice raised in anger. Occasionally a frightened, or worried, or angry looking, officer would come out hurriedly, talking to himself and seeing no one, least of all the painfully new, obviously green looking second lieutenant waiting in the adjutant's office.

With half a glance one could see that he was new to the Service. Tall and clear skinned and clear eyed he might well be, but those attributes did not save him from the shrieking newness of his uniform, the excessive shininess of his boots, boots that rode high up against his knee cap instead of settling in gracefully careless folds around the calf of the leg and

A Novel of the U. S. Cavalry on the Mexican Border

by

MALCOLM
WHEELER-
NICHOLSON



the ankle. His bright and sparkling saber undimmed by desert sun or northern rain, told any one who looked that it had recently come from the well stocked shelves of some military outfitter along F Street in Washington, D. C.

When he moved the saber gave away his newness in a more thorough going fashion. For this saber, with what seemed almost fiendish depravity, tangled itself up in his knee when he strode forward. It hung awkwardly on its hook, the leather slings stiff with newness. It had caught him under the knee as he reported to the adjutant. It swung most uncomfortably in his way at every step he took. Not to be learned in a moment is that slight outward thrust of the left hip at each step that swings the long scabbard rhythmically in and out to miss the knee as it advances.

How he envied the easy capable strides of the various officers who came and went as he waited. They were bronzed and capable looking; he felt ashamed of his own untanned cheeks.

The adjutant went in to the colonel's office again. The door was left open.

"It's a new second lieutenant reporting; name's Davies," stated the adjutant calmly.

The colonel's voice rose like a sky rocket in a pyrotechnic display of purple language. Davies blanched.

"And why in the name of ten thousand putrid peanut pedlars the War Department sends me another everlastingly condemned, wet nosed shavetail, I don't know!" The voice sizzled and spluttered and roared. "Me with a regiment of cavalry without any men or horses, short two-thirds of my officers, bandits raging

up and down the Border on the warpath again! Hell!"

From then on, for what the colonel said about the War Department, root and branch, he could have been tried by court martial ten times over. He ended up with a roar—

"Send him in!"

THE ADJUTANT came out and beckoned to Davies. The newly arrived second lieutenant took a deep breath, realizing for the first time that it required real courage to be an officer. He picked up his white gloves nervously, trying to remember the ritual of reporting to his superior officer, a ritual that he had studied carefully until he was sure he had it letter perfect. How did it go? Yes, yes, to walk straight up to the desk, come to a full halt, bring both heels together snappily, raise the right hand in a smart salute and say, "Sir, Second Lieutenant Davies reports for duty!"

Alas for the well laid plans of mice and shavetails. As he entered the room, the treacherous saber, lurking forgotten at his side, suddenly inserted itself between his knees. The firm and manly stride with which his entry started ended up in an evolution which bore a faint resemblance to a poorly executed flying tackle. His face fiery red, Davies straightened himself out and tried to remember his lines. One look into the harsh blue eyes of the old colonel staring at him from behind the desk and he could think of nothing but a wild desire to go from there to elsewhere, anywhere at all. The colonel abated not one whit the frostiness of his eye as he plucked angrily at his long, white, drooping mustaches and regarded the embarrassed youth before him.

In the excitement, the white linen stock that Davies wore under the high collar of his olive drab blouse, rose up and peeked coyly out from behind his right ear. His cap worked itself up somewhere on the back of his head. The devilish saber, not content with the damage it had wrought already, came unslung from its hook and try as he might, he could not get it back in its proper place.

Totally forgotten was all the ritual that one was supposed to go through when reporting to one's commanding officer. From the colonel's viewpoint there was some excuse for anger. Here was an obviously new second lieutenant, looking the amateur to the last detail of uniform—that did not curve in at the proper places nor bulge out where it should.

"Well," growled the colonel at last, "what the hell do you think you represent?"

This was a most encouraging preface. Under its warming influence Davies promptly forgot everything else he knew. His mind became the most perfect of blanks. He tried to speak and only succeeded in stuttering.

The wrath of the colonel deepened. Davies watched the Old Man's mustache in fascination, absolutely certain that the colonel was going to pull said mustache out by the roots. A vast thundering noise was in his ears:

"And, by Gad, after dumping me down here in this hellhole of a place with only four men left to me in each troop and only about ten officers to the whole regiment, they have the nerve to send me a wet nosed, puling infant like you! What is the War Department coming to? That's what I want to know—what's the War Department coming to?"

The colonel leaned savagely across the desk, probing Davies with his harsh blue eyes.

The adjutant stepped up, soft footed, and whispered to the Old Man in an attempt to soothe him.

"Yes, yes," the colonel snapped testily, "assign him to G Troop. He can't do any harm there. Yes, yes, tell Sergeant Bannion to teach him his recruit drill and try to make a soldier out of him."

The colonel waved the obnoxious second lieutenant away. But the second lieutenant, too new to realize the advantage which accrues to him who gets quickly out of the colonel's way, foolishly waited upon the order of his going

and, in trembling tones, posed a question.

"Where can I find quarters?" he asked.

The adjutant shot him a warning glance then shook his head. Davies had beautifully blundered into one of the colonel's pet phobias.

"Quarters! Quarters—" The colonel came up for air—"where do you think you'll find quarters! Suppose I carry quarters around in my hat? Quarters! You're lucky to be alive. D'ye know where I live, I, the colonel of this regiment?" The Old Man beat his chest. "I live in a little two by four room that I have to go in sideways to get in at all! Me, the colonel! It's so small that there isn't room enough to swing a cat by the tail. Have to go outside to change my mind. Get the hell out of here, you and your quarters! Me with a thousand raw recruits coming in here any day and a thousand green remounts the day after and with nobody to drill them but a couple of knocked kneed, sore toed, spavined, wet nosed second lieutenants. Get out of here before I lose my temper! You and your quarters!"

DAVIES got, precipitantly and as swiftly as he could move. In his haste to reach the door he forgot all about his saber. That treacherous length of steel with almost diabolic ingenuity tangled itself up with his knees again. Davies lunged against the side of the door, untangled himself to a volley of strong language and somehow, in what manner he never knew, fell into the outer office, his forehead covered with perspiration and his eyes wild. He was absolutely certain that his military career was blighted at the start.

The adjutant followed him in a moment.

"Don't take the colonel's manner too seriously, young fellow," the grave eyed adjutant comforted him. "You see, we've just returned from the Philippines and we were ordered to leave our men and horses over there. All we have here is a skeleton regiment consisting of a few officers and non-commissioned officers. Now they are filling us up with recruits and remounts and the colonel is angry because they have only given him three or four months to get his regiment ready for Border patrol."

"I see," gulped Davies, watching the door apprehensively.

"Now," continued the adjutant, "you go down to the bachelor building and find yourself a room. Then go down to your troop, Troop G, and meet your first sergeant—he's an old-timer and he'll help you get straightened out."

Grateful at least for these few kind words, Davies set forth, still firmly convinced, however, that he might as well bid farewell to all hopes of making a career of the profession of arms.

BACK in the colonel's office the Old Man suddenly subsided and looked narrowly at the adjutant.

"Seems a nice enough kid," he remarked mildly enough.

"A little awkward," commented the adjutant, knowing better than to agree completely with the colonel on any subject.

"Awkward, certainly," retorted the old man testily. "We're all awkward until we get the iron of the military system into our souls. I like 'em awkward; shows that they are willing to learn. All they need is a little hell to make good stuff out of 'em. He'll do."

The colonel returned to his papers with a grunt.

DAVIES, carefully removing his belt with the detestable and treacherous saber dangling from it, put it under his arm and sought out the bachelor building.

This was far down at the end of the small cavalry post above the Rio Grande. It was an old brick building. Davies could find no one about. He knocked at several doors in the long hallway, but there was no response. Finally a sleepy looking Chinese cook appeared from

somewhere, evidently just awakened from his afternoon's siesta.

But the cook was capable. Without a word he led the newly joined officer up to a small bare room at the head of the upper hallway. It contained nothing but a broken chair.

"What'll I do for a bed?" asked the lieutenant.

The Chinese looked at him in surprise.

"You no catchem tloop?" he asked. "Catchem tloop, soldier he fix bed fo' you. Chow seven o'clock, everybody here," with which comforting words the Chinese faded from the picture.

Who was it he was supposed to call upon next? His squardron commander? Yes, he remembered now. Major Cranston was his name. Forth he hied him to find Major Cranston, hoping that he would be more approachable than the colonel. It was with some trepidation that he walked up to the porch of the major's quarters and rang the bell. A soft footed Philippine *muchacho* opened the door for him and bowed him silently inside.

Davies heard a voice upstairs, then the firm and assured tread of some masterful person descending. From the echo of the footsteps, he expected at least to be confronted with a man thick thewed and of surpassing height. Instead, a short, paunchy individual, wearing a *pince-nez* on a black silken cord, came strutting in, looking like nothing so much as a pursy and arrogant little turkey cock.

"How d'ye do, how d'ye do," barked the small major in a deep and resonant voice. "Very glad to see you I'm sure. Sit down. Have a cigar? No? You have joined us at a most unpropitious time, most unpropitious, I assure you. You undoubtedly have a great deal to learn, a great deal. I take it you know very little of the regulations and one's duty towards one's superiors and an officer's attitude towards his inferiors. I shall be very happy to instruct in those matters."

The little major stood up. To add weight to his homilies, he placed his *pince-nez* more firmly on his nose. His stubby forefinger waggled seriously at Davies; his voice took on the rounded periods of a man accustomed to public speaking.

"Remember, young man, that obedience, first, last and all the time, is the cornerstone of military life. Yours not to reason why, yours but to do and die, as a great poet puts it so aptly. Secondly, you must gain unswerving obedience from your subordinates and their deepest respect. In order to gain their deepest respect you must never confess ignorance of anything. If something comes up that you don't understand, cut off your right hand before you show your ignorance. An officer must never show ignorance. Remember that, young man, and you will go high. As an older officer with some small success to his credit—" Here the little major strutted slightly, so that Davies was hard put to it not to grin— "I can tell you that the path to success in the Army lies in careful study and strict compliance with the regulations. Make that blue book of Army Regulations your Bible, keep it under your pillow, make no decision without it, and you will always be right. Just as an example, I notice that you have your cross sabers nearly an inch from the U. S. on your collar. Regulations plainly prescribe that they shall be only half an inch. A small detail of course, but very important. Success in the Army means the observance of a multitude of small details . . ."

IT DAWNED on Davies somewhat dimly that total immersion in the observation of a multitude of small details might tend to make a man small minded, but his respectful listening attitude gave no hint of this. The major was undoubtedly pleased with the phrase he had succeeded in rolling off his tongue and repeated it once or twice to get the full flavor of it. The major's living room was sparely furnished, evidently the living room of a bachelor. A Government issue table, stiff and angular Government furniture, including a bookcase, gave the room an

air of monastic simplicity. The bookcase was empty save for a copy of Army Regulations, a Manual of Courts Martial, a Cavalry Drill Regulations bound in yellow cloth and one or two other manuals of regulations. Of other books there were none.

"It is very plain to see that as yet you know little of the Service—" the major stiffened a little as he rolled out the word—"and its obligations. But you will learn, you will learn. You must look to your superior officers as models and mold yourself upon them—" The major puffed out his chest slightly—"and call upon me for any information you may need."

Going down the steps of the major's porch, it suddenly occurred to Davies that in all the words sounded off by the pompous little officer there was not a single word of war or battle or fighting, only much talk of regulations. It puzzled him a little. He had thought in his youthful inexperience that an army was for fighting purposes.

Well, there seemed but little to do but look up the troop. Making his way over the sun scalded parade ground, he passed through the line of brick barracks in which one squardon of the regiment was housed and sought through a wilderness of tents and shacks for his own troop. Lifeless and deserted, the camp was a dreary place, all silent and untenanted. Finally with much difficulty, he found a shack marked Troop G.

INTO Troop G shack he went. Across one end of the shack was a cot. Reposing upon it, his mouth open and the place shaking with the vehemence of his snores, was a tall, heavily built man, his beard showing blue under his skin, his body clad only in breeches and undershirt.

Undoubtedly this was the first sergeant, reflected Davies, standing still in indecision. But what was the etiquette that governed a situation like this? Davies was indubitably in command of this troop, such as it was. As troop commander he would be perfectly justified in waking up the first sergeant and getting down to business. Taking a step toward the sleeping beauty, he stopped.

The first sergeant was a frightfully hard faced, capable looking individual. Davies doubted the expediency of awaking such a one suddenly and without previous warning, as it were. Somehow there was about the sleeping non-commissioned officer a little of the air of the colonel, something vaguely military, commanding, self-sufficient.

Thinking over the problem, he temporized. Suddenly he felt himself under the scrutiny of a pair of exceedingly frosty blue eyes. The first sergeant had awakened.

How it was done Davies never did know. But the sleeper was on his feet. With one swift motion he had put on his blouse and buttoned it to the last hook on the collar, in what seemed one sweep of his hand. With another swoop his feet were settled into his shoes and the puttees miraculously in place above them. All this was performed with incredible swiftness, with averted head, so that it seemed but a matter of a few seconds until the tall figure of the non-commissioned officer stood at attention before him.

Davies was somewhat taken back.

"Yis, sorr," the tall sergeant said with a rising inflection in his voice.

Looking into the wholesome Irish face before him, Davies felt a wave of thankfulness engulf him. There was something exceedingly fit and capable about this Irish sergeant and something exceedingly likable at the same time.

"I'm Lieutenant Davies—er— I seem to have been assigned to this troop—at least the colonel said — the colonel told me to come to this troop—and—" then sudden memory of all the colonel had said returned to him and he stuttered.

"Yiss, sorr, and glad Oi am to wilcome you, Liftinent."

The sergeant still maintained his rigid pose of attention, but his voice was hearty and the burr of his brogue a delight to the lonely ear of the friendless

shavetail. Was one supposed to shake hands with a non-commissioned officer? The question rose to plague Davies. Then his background of decency and training asserted itself; he suddenly did not care whether he violated all the regulations in the blue book. His hand shot out in friendly greeting. The sergeant shook hands gravely and courteously.

"Oi'm hopin' the liftinent will be likin' the throop," Sergeant Bannion went on.

Davies looked around, then suddenly remembered that officers were supposed to be addressed in the third person and that he himself was the lieutenant referred to.

"Sure, and it isn't much of a throop," confided Bannion, "bein' widout min and hoorses altogither, all of thim havin' been left behint in the Islands, as the colonel has probably told the liftinent."

"He did say something about it," hazarded Davies gravely, a spark of amusement in his eye. Sergeant Bannion grinned in sudden understanding.

"Shure and whin the colonel take ut into his head to rema-ark about anythin' ye can hear him ha-alf way across the St-a-ate of Tixas. A jewil of a mon is the colonel notwithstanding, Liftinent, shure, and there's na harm in him at all, at all. Oi misdoot he gave the liftinent the rough idge of his tongue but 'tis nought but his way wid newly joined orficers. Has the liftinent been assigned any quarthers as yit?"

Davies nodded.

"Has the liftinent been issued any blankets or biddin? No? Oi thought not, wid that murderin' horsethief of a Chinaman at the officers' miss."

THE FIRST sergeant, walking to the door of the shack, shouted down the empty street. One gave answer and there were words held between the Irish non-commissioned officer and one who stood without. Then the sergeant returned.

What was next on the program, wondered Davies. Certainly it was good to have fallen into the capable hands of this kindly Irishman. But he had never taken over a troop before and was uncertain. A soldier scratched at the canvas door of the shack.

At the sergeant's word he entered and asked some question about a requisition. The sergeant lifted the top of a field desk and drew forth a printed form, rapidly filling it in. As Davies waited he brought out his silver cigaret case and, deeming it impolite to take a cigaret alone, offered his open case to the soldier who stood at attention beside him. The man looked surprised. He relaxed his stiff pose and took one with a murmured thanks. Davies felt the eye of the first sergeant upon him. Somehow he felt that he had done wrong.

When the man left Sergeant Bannon came up to him.

"Beggin' the liftinent's pa-ardon—" his voice was respect itself—"but the liftinent should not be offerin' cigarets to a sodger the first time he meets him. Sure and it is all right when the liftinent knows the min and they knows him. Ye'll not mind an ould sergeant tillin' ye this, Liftinent?"

Davies flushed with the reproof but looked the sergeant steadily in the eye.

"Sergeant Bannion," he said very seriously, "that is only one of the many mistakes I'll make in the next few months. I would consider it a kindness upon your part if you would be good enough to correct me when I pull anything too bad to pass over."

The sergeant's face glowed. His hand shot out and gripped Davies' hand.

"Liftinent, we undtherstand each other extremely well. I wad be happy to steer ye through your first few months in the throop, puttin' a word in your ear now and thin—not that ye'll need it much for if Oi'm anny jedge, ye'll be takin' to it like a duck to wather."

To his crony, Sergeant Murphy of the Machine Gun Platoon, Bannion repaired that night, telling him of the new officer assigned to the troop.

"Anither uv them wet nosed byes?" asked Murphy.

"Indade and he's not—" Sergeant Bannion pulled his pipe out and waved it to lend emphasis—"it's a clear and stiddy oi the bye has and it's a foine orficer he'll be makin' befoor very long and one ye'd be proud to serve undther. The throuble wid most of the orficer lads whin they join up is unlarnin' all sorts uf foolishness and the most uf all aboot handlin' the min. Sure and I belave this one's been through somethin' that's stiddied him loike a rock. 'If Oi pull anything too bad to pass over ye'll correct me, Sergint,' he says to me, quiet loike and serious. He fair creaks wid newness and the shinin' new leather of him. By the new shininess of his leather ye can always tell a new second liftinent."

"But ye can't tell him much," Murphy objected soberly.

"This one ye can, praise be." Bannon was emphatic.

CHAPTER II

RIO GRANDE RUMORS

IT HAD struck Davies, leaving the troop at last, that he had violated one of the very strongest of the major's precepts right at the start. He had allowed a subordinate to correct him and had not only allowed but confessed his ignorance without concealment. Why not, he asked himself half angrily. The sergeant was old enough to be his father. Besides, Sergeant Bannion was every inch a man, a man whom it would be ridiculous to attempt to bluff, even in the unlikely event that he could get away with it.

It was nearly time to dress for dinner.

He found his room furnished in comfort, bed and bedding, an old bureau and table and chair. His clothes were laid out for him, and his toilet articles spread neatly to hand. In all this he discerned the fine hand of Sergeant Bannion. Sure enough, an extremely thin faced and pessimistic looking soldier reported to him as orderly and striker, evidently having been impelled thereto by the strong representations of Sergeant Bannion.

At dinner that night he would meet all the bachelor officers of the regiment. Looking forward to this with mixed feelings, he bathed and changed from the olive drab into blue dress, rather enjoying the feel of the snug trim blouse with its heavy gold shoulder straps and the well cut breeches in sky blue with the broad golden yellow stripe down the side and the patent leather boots and nickled spurs.

Downstairs, in the dining room, Davies could hear the hum of many voices and the occasional outburst of laughter. The mess was assembled.

At the door, he received a quick impression of a large gathering of young men all quite spruce and colorful in the cavalry blue, black and gold; the table was encircled by a row of bronzed faces below which was another ribbon of color, the golden shoulder straps, and below that the black blouses. The talk and laughter ceased suddenly as he came in and stood quietly by the door. The senior officer of the mess rose in his place, a tall young first lieutenant still not wholly recovered from the dengue fever of the Islands. All the officers arose courteously, and he was introduced and shook hands with each in turn.

A place was shown him. As quickly as the formal introductions were ended, no one paid him any further attention. This worried him somewhat, until he realized that it might be the custom of this very old regiment to take the new arrival on sufferance, to put him on probation until he had won his welcome. This was exactly the case. But it was a little lonely and he hoped that it would not continue indefinitely. Some instinct told him to be silent and keep himself to himself until the ice was broken.

He did not realize it, but his very silence and unobtrusiveness worked heavily in his favor among these officers, most of whom were graduates of West

Point and inclined to be wary of men from "tin schools", as any military school outside of West Point was termed. That some of these schools gave a very broad and thorough training and were allowed to graduate second lieutenants directly into the Army made no difference. A tin school was a tin school and it made no difference that Davies had put in four hard working years at one of the best of them.

One officer at the table was the exception to the general rule, a Lieutenant Britten. He was cordiality itself. Davies soon discovered the reason. For long and weary months Britten had been the regimental "goat", the lowest ranking second lieutenant, and available for all unpleasant details. Davies' arrival had pushed him out of this position and he was correspondingly grateful.

TALK at the table was exceedingly interesting, for it was about war and the chances of a fight in Mexico. Davies was to find that one of the delights of service on the Border was the constant tension, the taut expectancy of active service. Always on the horizon, like the distant diapason of a vast organ, was the rumble and mutter of possible war across the Border.

Things were in a chaotic condition across the line. Madero had supplanted Diaz, and had been murdered while Huerta had seized the power. Now Venestiano Carranza had revolted in Coahuila while Sonora had revolted under the leadership of Obregon. Villa, temporarily eclipsed, was said to be gathering supplies for a new army.

"They say he's on this side of the line somewhere organizing his new outfit," some one at the table announced.

"I heard he'd gone across to the other side and was already in the field," another one stated.

"But that murdering Gordino of his was seen somewhere in Sonora, reorganizing the Escolta del Oro," announced the senior lieutenant decisively. "I got that from Whitley downtown on the staff."

"Hasn't that dog been killed yet?" asked an officer at the end of the table.

"Not a chance. He'll start murdering prisoners again as soon as he gets going. That's about his speed."

Davies heard more about this Gordino and his methods and hoped silently that he would some day have the pleasure of meeting him in battle.

As they smoked their after dinner cigarets the adjutant came in, throwing his yellow lined, black cape over a chair as he remained for a whisky and soda and a cigar.

"Any new dope, Captain?" asked some one.

"Yes, we get one thousand recruits tomorrow," replied the adjutant quietly.

"Whew!" A sigh went up from the mess.

"And a thousand remounts day after tomorrow!" the captain went on.

The table took this news thoughtfully.

"Hell of a lot of work in store!"

"Lord, how we'll sweat!"

"But we'll have a regiment again at last, instead of this skeleton outfit we've been nursing for months."

"You'll have plenty of work all right. The War Department is only giving us three months to get them into shape before sending us on patrol duty," the adjutant went on.

"Shooting and everything else?" The voice was incredulous.

"Everything."

Again there was silence. To teach a cavalry soldier how to ride, shoot a pistol and rifle, use his saber, take care of himself and his horse, scout, march, fight and drill takes more than three months. Instruction in shooting alone should take that time. But if it had to be done, that was all there was to it.

Flinging his cape about his shoulders and fastening the silken frog across his chest as he had seen it done, then carelessly throwing one corner of it over one shoulder to show the orange yellow lining, as he had also seen it done, Davies went forth into the night to walk and reflect,

also to pay his duty call on the colonel at his quarters. Luckily the colonel was not at home. Davies thankfully slipped the bit of pasteboard, with its one corner turned down meticulously, under the colonel's door, and sped away silently. He walked alone through the velvety Texas night, marveling at the serried ranks of stars, drawn in such perfect perspective overhead.

Across the river he could see the dim lights of Juarez, and far out on the Mexican plains the scattering lights of various farmsteads and villages. He dreamed of riding across there at the head of his troop, of deeds of bravery and masterly leadership that he would perform.

Returning, he found the bachelor building in an uproar. The officers were shouting and singing gleefully.

"What's up?" he asked Britten.

"Just got news that Villa is on the warpath again. War Department orders us to take the field inside of thirty days and patrol the Border, relieving the other regiment on patrol so that they can be ready."

CHAPTER III

A LITTLE OF EVERYTHING

THE NEWS was at the troop long before Davies arrived there in the morning. There was little time to rejoice. Backed up on the sidings of the fort were long trains of cars which disgorged a mob of recruits, for the most part awkward in ill fitting uniforms. The adjutant, the sergeant major, the troop commanders and first sergeants sweated at assorting them and assigning them to troops.

Some seventy of them were assigned to G Troop. Sergeant Bannion marched them to the troop street and lined them up. As far as Davies could see, there was little to chose between one awkward and ill dressed recruit and another. But Sergeant Bannion's eye was more skilled.

His eye lighted on one man.

"Second hitch?" he rasped out, pointing an accusing finger at the soldier.

The man nodded.

"Foine! Ye'll fall outa there and fall in over here."

As the man stepped out of the rank Davies looked him over curiously. Yes, there was undoubtedly something different about him, a little firmer set to the jaw, a heavier coat of tan, a more military swing to his shoulders.

Others were picked out by the sergeant's unfailing eye. Questions were asked of them. Most of them admitted previous service. One man replied with a broad English accent.

"Whut rigiment?" asked Sergeant Bannion.

"His Mawjesty's Queens Bays," returned the Britisher, a trifle haughtily.

"Is ut the truth ye're tellin' me?" Sergeant Bannion's tone was full of immense admiration and awe. "It must come woeful hard to you to be afther lowerin' yoursilf to be servin' in Uncle Sam's Own Loyal Royal Regimint o' Sorrels—" his tone suddenly changed—"and do ye be remimberin', my frish young bantam, that ye're no longer in his Mawjesty's Queens Bays, which its rightful name as ye well know, is the Sivinth Dragoon Guards, or it will become me painful and melancholious juty to rub your nose in the dirt. Had you been from Enniskillens now, the matther might have been different. Do Oi make mesilf clear to your imperfect intelleck?"

The Britisher nodded quietly, his haughtiness gone. He recognized the professional rasp of that voice and was satisfied to be at home again.

To watch the first sergeant work was a lesson in organization. He started by referring each matter to Davies, who soon told him to go ahead on his own. In a remarkably short space of time, without any fuss or friction, Sergeant Bannion had the troop organized into platoons and squads, had appointed acting noncommissioned officers and made a military unit out of what had been a mob ten minutes before.

Followed a day of feverish activity, the drawing of clothing and the issuing of equipment to the men. Under the flail of the colonel's tongue, the greater part of the work was done by dark, although Quartermaster and Ordnance worked far into the night.

THE NEXT day the shipments of horses began to arrive. They were issued in driblets as they came into the corrals. Davies, to his delight, drew the sorrels and, with Sergeant Bannion and the stable sergeant, clung precariously to the corral fence selecting them from the milling herd.

"A rare oi the liftinent has f'r a horse," remarked Bannion to Weatherbee the stable sergeant.

Davies said nothing about having been raised on a Western ranch, or about having spent four years at a tin school under the watchful eye and bitter tongue of an ex-Cavalry sergeant who had practically made a regular Army troop out of the forty cadets who formed the school troop.

It was when the horses were tied on the picket line that his skill began to show.

Carrying down from his quarters a light Saumer saddle, he indicated the end of the line of golden sorrel horses, fidgeting and wary animals, not yet accustomed to their new surroundings and stable mates.

"I'll start at this end of the line, Sergeant," he informed Bannion.

The first sergeant's eyes grew round.

"D'ye mean, sor, that ye intind ridin' all them wild eyed remounts y'rsilf?"

"Just that," said Davies. "Have to find out which ones need extra work."

To the accompaniment of the sergeant's wondering silence, he had the first animal saddled and mounted. The remount stepped out a little awkwardly, knowing little of the rein and the leg, but willing enough. It was unsaddled; the next and the next were equally docile. It was when they reached the fourth horse that Davies paused. This animal was an upstanding, slender legged gelding, his coat gleaming like fine gold.

As the saddle was placed on his back he crouched like a cat.

"Liftinent, y'd better let the min try him out; he's a bad oi, sor," expostulated Bannion, but to no purpose.

Davies had scarcely touched foot to stirrup when the gelding reared high in the air. He was rudely jerked out of that foolishness by a quick pull on the off rein, close to the bit. He came down on all fours, snorting and trembling. Davies closed his legs gently against the horse's sides in an effort to move him out. This resulted in a wild plunge. The horse got his head down between his knees and bucketed joyously back and forth, his body quivering from ears to tail in the effort to throw off the burr that clung to his back so tenaciously.

The men gathered around, admiration in their eyes.

Davies gave way to the horse's wild leaps, bending his back easily, so that the horse's motions seemed to ripple up his spine and lose themselves into the air above his head. This continued a few moments, Davies talking and stroking the excited animal soothingly the whole time. Slowly the horse calmed down. In a few minutes he was moving out willingly enough. Davies brought him back to the picket line and dismounted.

"Shure and it's rale ridin' you're doin' this day, sor," exclaimed Bannion.

"Not so much," explained Davies. "He isn't really vicious. I couldn't sit him in that saddle if he intended murder. He was only frightened and needed soothing down. Get the next one ready," he called to the stablemen.

THE DAY passed in this activity. Once Davies was thrown, landing easily on his feet and laughing as the men came running. He was again on the horse's back in a trice, and brought it back to the picket line after ten minutes, in a lather, after running it hard through the dust of the drill ground.

Toward the last his saddle muscles began to weary and he had great difficulty

in sitting even a mildly plunging animal. Luckily for him, the remainder of the horses were not especially hard to handle and he came through with flying colors.

Sergeant Bannion boasted of his lieutenant that night to his cronies.

"That's wan task I'll not have to be tachin' him," he nodded. "If ever there was a mon that knew a hoorse it's that liftinent of moine. And in a wee bit of a flat saddle no bigger than a postage stamp, Oi'm tellin' ye!"

Entering the mess that night, Davies found a slightly different atmosphere. Several of the officers addressed remarks to him at different times. Keeping to his plan, he replied courteously but spoke only when spoken to.

Finally the lean, malarial lieutenant at the end of the table spoke up.

"Saw you sitting a couple stiff legged buckers today from my corral," he remarked. "Didn't know that it could be done in a Saumer saddle." The table of officers listened silently.

"Real bad ones couldn't," replied Davies. "These today seemed more frightened than vicious, or so I thought," he added modestly.

A glance of approval went around the table. The subject was changed and Davies relapsed into silence again. He could not help but feel the friendliness of the atmosphere around him, however, and he remained at table after the coffee and listened in on the conversation. By the same token he nearly dropped off to sleep, the day having been harder than he realized. There is a certain amount of nervous tension about mounting a great number of strange horses; it had required the expenditure of more energy than he realized.

THE NEXT day started off with a rush, a rush that was constantly accelerated.

"What are the liftinent's ordthers for the drillin'?" asked Sergeant Bannion as a matter of courtesy; he had carefully planned the whole day's work.

Davies grinned into the sergeant's eyes.

"Let's see what you've doped out," he asked. The sergeant handed him a sheet containing a schedule of hours and formations.

"Very good," nodded Davies; then, his voice firmer, "but I don't believe in long drills. A little of everything at high speed and many changes. We'll get quicker results that way. Let's divide the work up by platoons, one platoon at dismounted drill, another at sighting and aiming drill, another with the horses. Then today we should get a line on our acting squad and platoon leaders and 'can' the ones that are no good."

Sergeant Bannion nodded, a worried frown clearing off his face as if by magic.

"Right the liftinent is!" He went away marveling, but not quite certain.

When a weak voiced squad leader attempted to give some command, running his preparatory command and his command of execution together in a piping falsetto, Sergeant Bannion watched Davies, who listened with a frown on his face.

"No, that won't do."

The lieutenant stepped up to the squad leader and drew him aside out of hearing of the men. Then and there the new squad leader received a lesson in giving commands with a punch to them. Bannion looked like a cat who had just eaten the cream.

"The bye knows his shtuff," he smiled to himself, and went about his own tasks.

Whether it was the enthusiasm of youth, whether it was the shorter periods of snappier work or what it was, the men began to form into cavalry soldiers with remarkable speed.

"We're endin' the sand bag drill today, thanks be," Sergeant Murphy remarked one evening.

"Faith, mon, we've ended thim four days ago and the min is busy knockin' out good scores with the sub-caliber goons," Sergeant Bannion boasted.

"That new boy orficer o' yourn is pushin' 'em fast. Belike he'll push 'em too fast and have the Ould Mon down on his neck."

"He will loike hell!" Sergeant Bannion's tone was belligerent. "Only today the Ould Mon comes ridin' by and watches where the liftinent is sweatin' the fat off a bunch near the picket lines. Snappy drill they was doin'. The Ould Mon says nothin' for a space, then he calls to me. 'Ye seem to be makin' a throop of calvary outa this mob in spite o' the young orficer,' he says to me. Quick as a flash I says, 'No sor,' Oi says, 'it is not that at all, at all; it's obeyin' orders Oi am from the young orficer entirely,' I says. 'I know it, Bannion,' he says, 'and he's devilopin' into a foine young orficer,' he says. If ut had 'a' been me own son Oi couldn't 'a' been more plazed. Then he says, 'Don't tell the young feller,' he says, 'but if he kapes up this lick, G Throop will be the first out on the Border pathrol,' he says, 'but kape that undther your hat,' he says, and rides away."

"And of coorse ye've towld no one ixciptin' the liftinent and aboot half the regiment," remarked Sergeant Murphy sagely. "It's a fine hat ye have, Mike Bannion, for kapin' things undther."

"Aw—" Bannion was a little abashed—"but Oi'm prood of the lad at that. Oi towld ye that he had the stiddy oi, did Oi not?"

"It's likely Oi've forgot ut, ye've towld me so many things. But it's a stiddy oi the young man will need to keep thrack of your gallivantin's over to Jaurez and sich loike."

"Thot's nayther here nor there," Bannion snorted.

"You get over there some night and wan o' them graysers plugs you wid a soft nosed bullet in the soft part o' your head and you'll wish you'd stayed over here."

AT THE mess that night Davies found himself included more and more in the general conversation around the table. Before he had time to rejoice in the letting down of the wall that kept him a stranger in the midst of his own kind, he was asked by Weston, a little red headed lieutenant, and two others whether he wanted to go with them on a little frolic to Juarez that night.

Forgotten was the heat and weariness of a grinding day spent at the target range and the drill ground, forgotten were aching muscles and tired head. Would he go? Would a fish swim? It was the first time that he had even been included in those parties that nightly left the bachelors' building an echoing and lonely emptiness. He had changed into civilian clothes in five minutes and joined the party in the asthmatic car they had hired for the trip.

CHAPTER IV

AT THE BLACK CAT CAFÉ

THE RALLYING point in Juarez was the Black Cat Café.

The American officers had a table up in the balcony, above the main floor, a table they had selected both for its privacy and for the view it gave them. The drinks were good, but the music was a Mexican attempt to play American jazz. Not so good, in other words. The tourists were all dressed alike and all acted alike, with flushed faces, much hearty fellowship and a disposition to take the whole world in on their enjoyment of the time and place. Even the Mexicans were clothed alike in suits ready made in Chicago by the thousand gross. It was most depressing. Davies was glad later when the tourists left for the keno games.

He approved of his own companions. The three of them had won his liking by the serious minded and judicial calm which they preserved while getting themselves comfortably filled with liquor. One of these, the wiry framed, red headed Weston, seemed almost pensive in his potations, his eyes filled with a gentle melancholy as he surveyed the scene below.

That scene had gradually changed. The tourists were gone. Only native Mexicans were left, and they filled the

place with intense, low voiced conversation. The orchestra had ceased its jazz efforts and had swung into the stirring, martial strains of some Spanish regimental air, so inspiriting that people unconsciously threw back their shoulders and straightened out in the chairs.

THE DOOR swung open and the big frame of a heavily built Mexican filled it. The newcomer's clothes certainly had not been made in Chicago. Velvet jacket gleaming with silver buttons, velvet trousers tucked into riding boots and a large silver encrusted sombrero gave him distinction enough without the cartridge bandoleer flung over one shoulder and the pearl handled knife stuck negligently into a broad sash. But what attracted the watching Americans' notice the most was the hush that fell over the room as the fellow stood insolently surveying them from the doorway.

"*Madre de Dios!*" Davies heard in tense Spanish from nearby. "It is Gordino himself! He displays the great courage to come into Juarez!"

The big Mexican swaggered into the room followed by eight or ten booted and spurred companions. The party noisily seated themselves at the table directly below the balcony where sat the Americans. Evidently the big Mexican was a person of consequence, judging from the respect paid him by his followers.

The proprietor of the café, his fat, round, face creased into lines of forced good nature, approached, rubbing his hands, to take the orders of the new party. He was especially humble and cringing to the big Mexican.

"That bird," announced Weston in a dreamy voice, "has all the appearance of an accident looking for a place to happen. He dresses himself up like a Christmas tree and thinks he's a real bad *hombre*. He looks like the prodigal son—"

"Sh-sh!" warned Davies, listening, for he could hear syllables of liquid Spanish floating up from below. It was the proprietor speaking.

"It has been a sadly long time since I have seen you, señor," he was saying. Weston listened, then shaking his red head in bored indifference, attacked a great platter of *frijoles con carne* that graced the table.

Davies followed the words closely.

"*De los padres santos!*" ripped out the tall Mexican. "It has been nearly two months now since a gringo put me into the hospital. May all gringoes sizzle in hell! It is good to be out once more."

The proprietor's fat face grew long with sympathy and concern. "I heard of your accident, señor; it must have been no ordinary gringo who hurt you?" His voice was unctuous and flattering.

"*Es verdad!*" exploded the heavy voice. "It is true that such an animal must have been spawned by the Evil One. My soldiers call him the Black One. They believe him possessed by the Prince of Evil himself. Myself, I do not know, but it is certain that bullets nor knives can not hurt him."

"Truly he must be a person of frightful appearance, señor!" exclaimed the proprietor.

"But no," returned the heavy one, "he is of an appearance very ordinary, being blue eyed and black haired with very black whiskers showing on the face. He is a soldier of the *americanos* and came at me with one of his friends—whom also I failed to kill," he added as an afterthought.

"It is certain, then, that no human hand can hurt him," the oily voice of the proprietor announced.

Davies, listening above, grinned to himself.

"None. He is protected by some charm," agreed the big Mexican definitely. "I myself tried to shoot him with rifle and pistol, all to no avail. In spite of it all he caught me unaware and threw me heavily, then savagely attacked me with his heavy boots. It is certain that he is bewitched, for at least fifty of my men fired at him as he ran away but no bullet touched him."

DAVIES leaned over to Weston.

"I know how Bannion got those bullet holes in his hat," he announced.

"The hell you say!" marveled Weston, and tried to follow the conversation below.

"What finally was his fate?" the proprietor questioned deferentially.

"*Quien sabe?*" The tall one shrugged his shoulders. "He swam the Rio Grande. The gringoes are probably suffering from him by now." He raised his voice and his eyes, looking upward to where the Americans sat quietly watching him from the balcony. "Being accursed, he probably has many friends among the gringoes!"

Davies glanced at his companions. Weston gave no sign that he had heard except that his foot tapped the floor. The very indifference of the Americans seemed to sting the Mexican to further remark for he raised his voice still higher.

"It would be a fitting thing if an earthquake swallowed all the gringoes; the very air stinks of those pigs!"

Davies glanced apprehensively at Weston's red head. That youth rose, yawning and stretching as though enormously bored with the whole proceeding. The three other Americans watched him in a bright eyed and curious fashion. Weston reached down and picked up the great platter of *frijoles con carne*, brown beans swimming in a rich, hot, meat gravy. He balanced this thoughtfully in his hands. Davies started to rise. But he was too late.

With an air of detached and scientific interest Weston carried the steaming mess to the balcony rail and emptied it splashing over the tall and unsuspecting Mexican below.

"Speaking of pigs, they never stop grunting until you feed them their swill."

Saying which, he walked calmly and sedately down the stairs that led to the lower floor at the door of the restaurant. The other Americans followed him, not quite so sedately, Davies bringing up the rear and looking exceedingly worried.

They were plainly walking into trouble. They could hear shouts and curses as they went down the stairs. On the lower floor they found that the Mexicans had not yet thought to approach the door, so their line of retreat was safe. The big Mexican had risen, half drowned with the flood of greasy beans and gravy which slithered over his head and shoulders and down the ornate, flaring lines of his velvet jacket. He was gasping and shouting. His companions chattered with excitement, startled by this unexpected barrage of beans.

The four Americans were nearly at the café entrance. Suddenly they were sighted. The big Mexican came toward them, drawing his knife from his sash. Davies, guarding the rear, swiftly herded his three companions towards the door.

Weston turned and watched the excited clamoring of the Mexican group, now drawing nearer. He nodded approvingly.

"This makes four of a kind against a full house. Read 'em and weep, you coffee colored Napoleon!" he abjured the angry and bean spattered Mexican leader.

"Beat it, you damn' fools!" Davies shoved Weston through the open portals and herded the other two outside.

Turning, he made a quick step toward the advancing Mexicans, picking up a chair as he strode. Swinging this around his head, he threw it swiftly and accurately at the leader, still half blinded with the errant beans. The chair, hurtling through space with speed and precision, caught the *frijole* covered desperado full on the point of the jaw. He sat down, very suddenly and very forcefully.

Weston nodded grave approval through the open doorway.

"Jolly well played," he commented, then started to count with a pointing forefinger much in the manner of a referee at a prizefight, "One! Two! Three!"

"On your way," grunted Davies, and pushed through the door, closing it after him.

"Oh, let me just drop one more mess of pottage on the prodigal son," pleaded Weston, but he was pushed and shoved towards a waiting taxi and away they went, followed by a fusillade of shots and shouts.

SAFELY across the bridge in El Paso, Weston decided suddenly that American dignity had been trifled with, and he was all for returning to clean up the place. Davies dissuaded him and he subsided, lamenting loudly the fact that a fellow could never have any fun.

"Who, if I might ask, was the unpleasant Mexican gentleman?" asked Davies casually.

"Him? He's the bird named Gordino," one of the trio announced.

"Yes? What's his speciality?"

"He's a murderer, wholesale business, shoots down a hundred men at a time—if they are all tied up. He goes around shooting unarmed prisoners."

Weston woke up suddenly.

"Give me a plate of beans and an armful o' chairs, and I'll clean up all the bandits in Mexico," he announced firmly; then more condescendingly, "that was one nice jolt you handed him, Davies. I'll bet a dollar to a hole in a doughnut he's never had a chair wrapped around his neck in that emphatic way before."

"Isn't he an enemy at the Huertista crowd?"

"Sure he is."

"What's he doing in Juarez then?"

"Dunno. They take their bandits so damn' casually in Mexico," interpolated Weston, "a woeful weakness in an otherwise estimable people." He wagged his head sadly.

CHAPTER V

ORDERS

NEXT morning after drill Davies sought out Sergeant Bannion, observing quizzically the crown of the sergeant's campaign hat, a crown plentifully perforated with holes. Rolling a cigaret, the lieutenant looked again at the bullet holes and then dropped his eyes to Sergeant Bannion's face.

"What's this I hear about your going over to Juarez single handed and tackling all the bandits in sight?" he inquired.

A startled look from Bannion showed that the shot had hit home.

"Glory be to their tongues, Liftinent, but the sodgers of this rigiment can spread a powerful lot of woild lies about a hard workin' non-commissioned orficer. Woild tales they are, Liftinent. Sure and ye need give a sodger no more than a pace of a thrid of a story and he'll make up an entire histhory without half tryin' at all, at all."

"But it wasn't from soldiers I heard this story, not unless you want to call Mexican bandits soldiers."

"Mixican bandits is ut?" Bannion cocked a wary eye at his lieutenant. "Mixican bandits, no, sorr, I wad not be callin' thim insanitry, slack and foolish reptiles sodgers, nor anything like sodgers. If they are sodgers, thin I'm a first class ma-a-jor-gineral wid me stummick restin' easy on the pommel of me saddle." Bannion snorted in disgust. "Did the liftinent ever see the way thim bandits trates their horses? No? It's sinful and scandulous and a fair cryin' shame. Spakin' of horses, that No. 74 mare is a jumpin' fool. She's been doin' betther than four feet four these last three days. Won't the liftinent try her out? She fair skims over the rails like a burrd."

Davies displayed the proper amount of enthusiasm over the performance of the No. 74 mare, then brought back the subject which Bannion was so skillfully evading.

"But how about this battle of yours with the bandits?" he continued patiently.

"Oh, that!" Sergeant Bannion's tone was that of one surprised at the bringing up of a subject long since finished. "Ye heard the tale from the Mixican bandits thimselves ye were saying, Liftinent?" Bannion was still evading the issue.

"Yes, from the Mexicans, one Mexican especially, a tall husky looking Mexican

who'd just come out from the hospital."

"Oh," Bannion nodded, "that would be bein' me old friend Gordino belike. The liftinent's been talkin' to that worthless limb of Satan?"

"Not talking to, listening to."

"Oi see, ye know the sthory, but not what started the whole fracas?"

"No."

"Sure and it all started where so many a mixup shtarts, in the ba-ar-room. It was the ba-ar-room of the Gem Saloon, the little room behint the bar, rather, where me and Sergeant Murphy of the Machine Gun Platoon was havin' a small drink to cut the dust from our throats. In comes Liftinent Wiston, the red haired little liftinent. He's very cheerful is the liftinent and passes the time o' day wid us all friendly.

"Oi'm for lavin' so's the liftinent can have his bit of a drink in private widout bein' annoyed, but he says 'No,' he says, 'shtay where ye are, Sergeant,' he says, 'it's an honor,' he says, 'f'r a shavetail like me,' he says, 'to be afther havin' a drink wid a couple of distinguished ould sodgers loike you and Sergeant Murphy,' he says. By the same token Oi sees the liftinent needs a bit of lookin' afther—a very foine gintlemin is the liftinent." Sergeant Bannion looked at Davies quickly. "Oi would not for the world have any wan know of this party."

Reassured by Davies' understanding nod, he went on.

"But 'tis plain to be seen that he is your friend and ye probably know the story anyways."

"I don't know it, if that will make any difference," Davies broke in.

"No matther, no matther, ye'll be careful in any case that no word comes out concerning the lad and his bit of a party. Well, as I was sayin', we three stood there all quiet-like takin' our bit of a drink and paying no attention to a soul whin in comes this long Mixican la-ad wid a bould bad look about him that Oi did not like at all. So I oop and asks the barkeep—

" 'Who might that whiff o' last year's garbage be?' Oi asks the barkeep rale polite, pointin' out the Mixican.

" 'Tis Gordino the bandit, the leader of the Escolta del Oro,' he whispers, and at that bit of news Oi loikes the looks of the Mixican still less. And Liftinent Weston overhears it and stares at the bandit very haughty and displazed loike in his bearin'.

"All might have gone well at that, had not this misbegotten cross betune a horny cactus and a rattlesnake taken into his hide to thrust his onwilcome coompany upon his betthers. He teeters up to us, grinnin' and smoilin' all over the ugly face of him.

" 'Will señors the Americans have the drink with me?' he asks.

"Very angry this made me, Liftinent, for it is not for the likes of him to be afther thrustin' his company upon the society of an Amurrican orficer wishful to enjoy his drinks in peace, and Oi up and says verry cold—

" 'Ye'll pardon me,' Oi says, 'but we do not drink wid strangers,' Oi says, '*is*pecially,' Oi says, very sarcastic, 'whin thim strangers is thavin' murderers who shoot down unarmed prisoners,' I says and tu-r-rns me back upon the impidint scut."

SERGEANT BANNION straightened out suddenly and saluted. Davies turned and found Major Cranston regarding them. Bannion straightway found something to do elsewhere. The little pursy major came up, twirling his *pince-nez* by its silken cord.

"Mr. Davies, I regret to see that you spend a great deal of your time talking and listening to enlisted men, especially this Sergeant Bannion. A very estimable character is Sergeant Bannion, very worthy, but after all he is only an enlisted man. Discipline can not be preserved, Mr. Davies, when officers associate too much with enlisted men."

To Davies the heavy pronouncements of the little major had all the rolling cadence of ancient and hoary maxims,

secreted deeply in the wisdom of an ancient people.

"Yes, sir," acquiesced Davies politely, and watched the major pursue his stately progress toward another troop. Walking quietly down to where Sergeant Bannion stood by the store tent, Davies addressed him.

"And what happened after you told the bandit where to head in?" he asked curiously.

"Oh, nothin', sorr, nothin' much, only this here Gordino he nods his head kind of slow and poisonous loike, sort of mane and cowld loike a bad nathured voiper.

" '*Sta bueno!*' he says, very mad loike, 'only,' he says, 'Oi would not advise you to come on the Mixican soide to Juarez,' he says, 'you nor any av yoor frinds,' he says, and walks out."

Again Bannion paused. Davies waited patiently.

"The rist of the tale the liftinent knows probably as will as Oi do," Bannion went on, "but it was the nixt avening afther pay day whin Oi'd a few drinks undther me belt and Oi rimimbers sudden loike this limb of Satan and become wishful to show him the contimpt his re-marrks had produced in me breast. It was in this resintful frame of moind that Oi goes to Juarez and mates up with this la-ad agin and there follows a royal battle."

Bannion's eyes gleamed with the memory of it.

"If Oi do say it, a royal battle, durin' the coorse of which maybe Oi mishandled him grievous—at any rate his friends coom runnin'. Opp till thin Oi was enjiyin the fracas, but thin Oi loses me timper. Too many of his frinds kape on coomin' and finally Oi reasons that it's time Oi was batin' a strategic retrate and laves that place and the whole coffee colored gang behint me."

The story came to an end. Davies tapped his boot thoughtfully with the thong of his riding crop as he gazed over the dusty plain.

"Sergeant," he said gravely at last, "there are none too many good noncoms in this troop. I can't afford to lose you just yet for a while. I'll have to ask you to stay away from Juarez altogether."

"Very well, sorr," Bannion looked a little sheepish. "Shure and Oi have no time now for that foolishness. It was the long waitin' wid nothin' to do that got itself undther me skin. But it looks to me as if there'd be sure enough throuble startin' on the Border soon. Has the liftinent heard annything of oor goin' across to clane up the whole of Mixico?"

"Not a word except rumors. I should think you'd seen enough of fighting in your experience, Sergeant. Why are you so anxious to get to Mexico?"

" 'Tis nothin', nothin' at all, but till me, Liftinent, is ut the truth that thim Mixican churches is simply filled wid gowlden images?" Bannion waited anxiously on the reply. "Oi've heard till that thim big cathedrals over there is simply crammed wid all manner o' gowld and silver and jewels," the sergeant explained wistfully.

Davies grinned in spite of himself.

"Why, maybe so, maybe so, I've heard that. But tell me, Sergeant, you're a good Catholic, aren't you? You certainly wouldn't loot a Mexican church?"

Bannion thought this over. Then he shook his head.

"Yis, sor, Oi'm a good Catholic, none bether—" Then with an ingenuous smile, a smile that would have disarmed the most saintly, he added—"but thim Mexicans, Liftinent, *they* ain't good Catholics!"

Davies was still laughing to himself when he saw the white mustache of the colonel heave into view at the head of his troop street with the harsh blue eyes of that choleric individual glaring above them. Accompanying the colonel was the little major, treading warily, somewhat in the manner of a cat in a strange alleyway, with many a sidelong glance at the colonel's forbidding profile.

The twain rapidly bore down on Davies, who saluted politely and waited for what storm might be breaking.

"Do you suppose you could run a troop

of cavalry all by yourself?" the voice of the colonel barked at him.

"I think so, sir." Davies' voice contained a note of surprise.

"I mean all by yourself, out on the Border?" the colonel shot at him.

"Yes, sir." There was no use confessing lack of self-confidence.

"Well, your troop isn't so—" The colonel stopped to reflect a moment. He had almost allowed himself to pay a compliment to somebody. That would never do.

"Your troop is about as bad as the rest of them, but I'm going to send you out to Sierra Roja tomorrow morning. They are being raided out there by Gordino and his ghouls. You get your outfit ready and move it out on time, d'ye understand?" The voice of the colonel was almost threatening.

"Major Cranston here is going to be in charge of the district. I'll send more troops in a week; this one is the only one that is anywhere near ready."

"Yes, Colonel," purred the little major, "I have devoted especial attention to this troop."

Davies looked at the major in astonishment. To his certain knowledge the pursy little man had not been around the troop more than twice in three weeks. It was Davies' first experience of the old Army game, which is to appropriate all credit for successes and graciously permit one's juniors to retain all the blame for failures.

But the colonel was not impressed. He stared at the little major coldly for a full ten seconds, nearly shriveling that individual.

"H-r-ru-ump!" snorted the colonel in great contempt, and walked away.

"Sure and it's a sad eyed bunch of orphan Boy Scouts we're takin' into the field, Liftinent," opined Sergeant Bannion, "but be the mercy of hivin and a bit of scoldin', we'll knock thim into sodgers 'fore they've traveled many miles. And will you hear the la-ads cheer," he said delightedly, "for all the wu-r-rold loike rale sodgers?"

The news had been told to the men, and there was great rejoicing. The gawky serious eyed Tennessee and North Carolina boys who made up the recruit replacement for the regiment were good stuff at heart, slow to learn but tenacious of knowledge once gained.

"They're green la-ads but depindable."

Sergeant Bannion went down the line with the rough edge of his tongue, his voice exultant with the knowledge that field service beckoned at last. The joyous note in his voice transmitted itself to the men and they threw themselves upon their preparations like a pack of eager hounds.

"Oho, teacher's pet," gibed Weston that night at mess, and the other officers grinned at Davies and joked him on the rank favoritism displayed by the crusty old colonel.

"It's Sergeant Bannion," Davies explained. "That blamed Irishman has chivvied them into working their fool heads off day and night."

"Yes?" inquired the mess politely.

FAR INTO the night Davies worked over his beloved field equipment, getting ready for the first time that he was actually to mount and ride forth with a troop of cavalry at his back.

The heavy canvas bedding roll, waterproof so that in emergency it could be used as shelter, was made ready. His trunk locker, the small greenish box, with its single tray, was filled with his extra underwear and reserve clothing, a few books and reserve toilet articles, saddle soap and cleaning materials. The pistol was taken to pieces and oiled and cleaned until it worked with the smoothness and certitude of a dynamo. The pistol magazines were cleaned and oiled and each filled with five stub nosed, steel jacketed bullets. Two of the magazines were inserted into the magazine carrier on his belt and the third slipped into the butt of the pistol where it clicked into place.

Weston, lounging and advising from the edge of the bunk, sat bolt upright as he

saw Davies' field saber, a long keen straight piece of Solingen steel.

"Where'd you get that engine of destruction?" he asked.

He examined the fine piece of steel curiously, admiring the slim grace of the blade which tapered down to a chisel point, exceedingly brisk and businesslike in its quiet readiness. Compared with the clumsy American Cavalry saber in use at that time it really was efficient looking.

"Don't see any use in packing along the regulation saber; it is no good for the cut and almost useless for the thrust, so I sent to Europe for this," he explained.

"And will you get on to the field glasses?" Weston admired, focusing the adjusting screws of a compact set of binoculars. "Gee! Those things must have set you back a month's pay!" he marveled, examining the lenses and the workmanship. "You ought to be able to see a fly scratch the back of his neck with his left hind leg a mile away with these things."

"They are German artillery glasses," Davies explained.

A heavily machined, capable looking compass with a luminous dial and collapsible rear and front sight for use in mapping was next examined, and admired, as well as a wrist watch with split second attachment and a luminous dial. It came over Davies that the two of them were quite like a couple of women admiring each other's clothes and new hats. He suddenly understood why women are so interested in clothes—their field equipment for campaign in no less degree than the soldiers' equipment for battle.

"Well—" Weston sighed a little enviously—"you may have a chance to use most of this junk blame soon. They tell me that Gordino is raising particular hell all up and down Rio Grande in front of your sector. Look out he doesn't grab you off for his Corral of Death. He's put a lot of the boys to sleep there and is always looking for new material to practise on. I heard today that he has recruited Villa's bodyguard, that Escolta del Oro that raised so much Ned, up to about two hundred and fifty men again. They're a bad bunch of plug-uglies."

Davies wondered how his troop of seventy-five men, most of them recruits, would stand up against the veterans of Villa's Guard of Gold. Somehow, recruits or no recruits, he felt that those lanky, gawky mountain boys of his troop would give a good account of themselves.

THE TELEPHONE bell rang. Davies answered. It was the adjutant talking.

"Have just received some orders from San Antonio, transmitted from Washington. They are very important. I'll send you over a copy right away."

In a very few minutes an orderly knocked at the door. Taking the typewritten sheets, Davies initialed the envelope and the time received and returned it to the waiting soldier. Unfolding the papers, he read them through, a puzzled frown on his brow. Then he whistled softly.

"What's up?" asked Weston casually.

"Nothing much. Only orders from Washington to all troops on the Border requiring all American Army detachments, when fired upon by Mexicans, to retire without returning the fire!"

"Wh-a-at!" Weston sat bolt upright on the bed, his feet hitting the floor with a crash.

"Absolutely. That has come from our peace at any price Secretary of State. Good Lord! Wait'll the greasers hear of this. It will be open season on American soldiers down in this neck of the woods!" Davies stared at the sheets of paper incredulously.

Weston swore with fluent and picturesque effect.

"Why, it's impossible; they can't mean it!" He ended with a sulphuric description of the powers that be. "They're so crazy it hurts. The Mexicans will be on to this order inside of two or three days and will be raiding all up and down the Border."

"You can't patrol a Border with soft soap. A soft nosed bullet is the only argument a Mexican bandit understands," Davies added.

"I wonder how far we're supposed to retire? Suppose they drive us to the Canadian Border, are we supposed to stop there or keep right on going?" Weston's tone was disgust itself.

Davies marveled at the fatuous complacence of the type of mind that could benignly ordain that American soldiers, patroling the Border at risk of life and limb, should be shot up at will by the aliens.

They went down to the dining room for a late supper.

Other officers drifted in. The discussion waged hot and furious.

"Disgraceful!"

"Cowardly!"

"Ridiculous!"

"It's always been that way," the malarial first lieutenant said dryly. "No matter how many soldiers are captured, shot, tortured, scalped or killed by Apaches or Sioux, by Filipino insurrectos or Mexican bandits, the darling little brown brothers must not be hurt in return, oh, no—"

> "They may be brothers of Billy H. Bryan
> But they ain't no brothers of mine!"

paraphrased Weston, and then went on singing the forbidden Carabao song the singing of which in its original form was a court martial offense:

> "Damn, damn, damn the greaser bandits—
> Pock marked, *kakiak ladrones!*
> Underneath the starry flag,
> Civilize them with a Krag,
> And return us to our own beloved homes!"

The whole crowd of officers swung into the chorus, a chorus which echoed out over the parade ground and drifted over to the married lines where many a staid and settled husband and father suddenly remembered that he had to see some one in the bachelor building on important business and went away to join the party.

The threatening growl of war on the horizon, the electric atmosphere of suspense, the natural exuberance of officers living and working daily in the high, clear air of this Southwest post, were sufficient causes for a party.

THE UPROAR grew as the night lengthened. Sergeant Bannion, sitting up with Sergeant Murphy in the Machine Gun Barracks near headquarters, heard the crashing chorus of "Forty Miles a Day On Beans and Hay, In the Regular Army-O" and grinned.

"The nixt thing on the program will be the Moro war dance, mark me wu-ur-ud, Murphy." And so it was.

Far off as if from the dim centers of kogan grass and jungle came the gentle throbbing of a copper gong. Another gong and another took up the insistent, disturbing note.

"They haven't yit got the big war goong into action. Wait till they tu-urn that baby loose and the Ould Mon will take a hand."

Hardly had the words left his mouth when from the long galleries of the bachelor building, stilling the lesser gongs as the voice of the gray wolf in the tall timber stills the voices of the yapping coyotes, came the strident, metallic, harsh and powerful notes of a great Moro war gong.

But the colonel, playing a quiet rubber of bridge with the adjutant and Major Cranston, listened as the clamor grew.

"Hadn't I better stop that racket, Colonel?" the major asked, his hand on the telephone.

"No, let them alone, they've had a hard time and they've got a heartbreaking time ahead of them with this outrageous new order from Washington."

The colonel's eye lost some of its harshness; he was thinking no doubt of similar outbreaks in his youth at distant Indian stations in the Dakotas and the far borders.

Around the long galleries of the bachelor building, prancing gravely, each man carrying a kris, a bolo or a spear,

trophies of their recent activities in the Islands, circled the young officers of the regiment, led by Weston banging on the great gong.

"Bontoc, Ifigao, Igorrote!
"Buting, Arroceras, y Carnote!
"Indit, Balatao,
"Taguig, Maralao,
"San Felipe, Neri, Culi-Culi!"

The voices crashed, accompanied by the steady beating of the gongs so that to Davies' eyes and ears the scene had all the effect of a savage tribe at their war dance. He marveled at the fluency of the officers in the native dialects, not noting that the song was simply a stringing together of the names of Philippine towns.

And it was a war dance, as savage as anything conceived in the midst of steaming tropical jungles, for was not Villa taking the field again and was there not always the chance of moving out against him?

CHAPTER VI

BANDITS

IT WAS a sleepy and red eyed officer that took over the troop in the morning before reveille had waked up the remainder of the regiment. The colonel was there, chewing on his white mustache and eying the solid rank of golden brown horses and the recruits astride them. Major Cranston walked about, soft footed but important.

"All right!" the colonel waved a careless hand. "Major Cranston will join you at Sierra Roja and give you your orders. Goodby, don't let yourself get shot up."

Davies gave his men the command "Fours right—march!" with a thrill in his voice that stirred recruit soldiers and green horses in spite of themselves. For he was off on a ninety mile hike with a chance of fighting at the end of it—off with a whole troop of some seventy-five sabers, his own guidon flaunting arrogantly behind him, his pistol on his right hip, his sword behind his right knee, the little bronze whistle of command hanging from his pocket, in his ears the staccato rattle of innumerable hoofs against the hard parade ground.

As the long column still further lengthened itself into columns of twos they passed through the outer gate of the fort and the sentries on duty presented arms. Once free of the fort, the way lay clear before them. He settled the column down to the steady walk and trot of the cavalry marching gait, the gait that reels off its miles hour after hour and covers huge distances with men and horses fit and ready at the end of it.

Once clear of the fort, he started in earnest to cover the miles, alternating the trot and walk with occasional halts to readjust equipment, moving out again to jingle smoothly and rhythmically, as the troop wound in and out of the low hills like some long dusty, swiftly traveling snake.

The men started very gaily, whistling and singing at "route order" the first hour out. Then the heat of the Texas sun began to make itself felt, the faces of the troopers became white with alkali dust and the march became a quieter and more dogged affair.

Turning in the saddle, Davies heard Sergeant Bannion's voice raised in expostulation half way down the undulating column.

"Sure and it's the favorite thrick of a brainless recruity to be afther drinkin' the hull of his canteen of wather in the first thu-urty minutes of hikin'. How often have I towled ye to be savin' your wather and only be moistinin' the inside of your mouth wid it? Now ye'll be fair perishin' wid a most outrageous thirst and the march scarcely started at all, at all!"

The heat of the day grew more intense. The group of nondescript dogs belonging to the troop had formed a cheerful half moon of yapping, tail wagging happiness, a fringe flung out in front of the advancing troop. But now the fringe lost most of its energy. The dogs began to drop back among the men and horses, running alongside with their tongues hanging out. At the next halt, Davies saw several men

sharing the water of their canteens with the dogs, pouring it on the parched tongues of the panting animals. Some few men here and there, were down plucking thorns from the footpads of their limping pets.

It was a great relief to the tired eyes when they saw the tree bordered streets of the first town.

THIS beautiful old town is one of the oldest in the United States. Its white walled adobe buildings nestled comfortably among the green of ancient trees and promised a few minutes' relief from the stabbing rays of the sun which beat mercilessly down upon man and beast.

Watching the advance squad as it entered the village ahead of him, Davies saw it gallop swiftly out of sight. Raising his head in sudden surprise, he waited for this phenomenon to explain itself.

A sudden crack of a pistol from the direction taken by the vanished patrol startled every man in the troop. Raising his hand in the signal to trot, Davies hurried the advance. Another pistol shot, this time farther away towards the river, and he put spurs to his horse, signaling the gallop. The troop swept up to the town, entering the main street with a thunder of hoofs. Halfway down the main street a lone soldier met them.

"Bandits!" he shouted, and led off down a side street toward the river at a gallop.

The soft earth of the lane was plentifully marked with horses' hoofs, many of them unshod. Galloping down the lane, Davies looked back and thrilled a little to see the high, keen, look of expectancy and delight on the faces of his men.

Ahead of him he heard splashing and cursing and another shot.

Suddenly he came out on the river bank. There, not two hundred yards away, a group of mounted Mexicans were scrambling their horses up a slight hill that commanded the river. They were in plain view, a beautiful target. The three men of the patrol were emptying their revolvers at them without any appreciable effect as far as could be seen.

It was simply a question of swinging his troop by the flank, giving them fight on foot and pouring a destructive fire into the Mexicans before they disappeared from view.

Still at the gallop, he swung sharp left, his troop following.

With a single sharp blast on his whistle he shot his hand into the air. The troop, now galloping along the shore, halted suddenly behind him. Another sharp blast and he drove downward with his clenched fist. With lightning-like speed half his men leaped from their horses, rifles in hand. The suggestive snick and rattle of breech blocks and tinkle of falling cartridge clips showed that they knew what they were supposed to do.

Flinging themselves prone on the shore in a line, they settled their guns into their shoulders and began to take aim at the rapidly disappearing Mexicans. In another second a devastating rattle of fire would have swept along the line.

Suddenly Davies raised his whistle to his lips and blew a long blast. The men looked up, startled.

"Cease firing!" he shouted. Men looked at him and saw that his face was white, whether with anger or fear they could not tell.

It was anger. For the young lieutenant, on this his first chance of action, had, in the excitement, forgotten the orders he had received the night before. Not until men's fingers were on the triggers ready to send a blinding sheet of leaden death into the ranks of the raiders, did he remember that he was not allowed to fire on Mexican bandits.

The men looked sullen and unwilling as the command came to mount.

THE TROOP was led back up the lane and to the main road once more. Davies saw a crowd milling around the general store. He dismounted his troop and strode inside, followed by Sergeant Bannion. At the door an old woman was

weeping noisily. Inside a hushed crowd stood about something which was on the counter. Looking over the heads of the crowd, he could see that it was the body of an old gray bearded man, a hole through the center of the forehead and the back of the head nearly blown away.

Sergeant Bannion swore softly and clenched his firsts.

"The dhirty bastes—and they got away widout a scratch!" he growled.

Davies shrugged his shoulders wearily.

"Orders are orders, only I'm afraid there'll be a lot more of this stuff before we're through with it. Who led the bandits?" he asked of the crowd.

"Gordino!" Fists were raised in the crowd and men spat angrily.

Some one handed Davies a slip of paper.

"This was left on the body," said the man.

Taking it, Davies saw that it was crudely written with a stub of a pencil in Spanish. Puzzling over the unfamiliar words he suddenly stared at Sergeant Bannion.

"This seems to be for you," he said quietly. "It's signed by Gordino himself. As nearly as I can make out he says, 'Let this be a warning as to what will happen to you.' He intends to make you drink with him and be glad of the chance before he's through. He says, '*Hasta luego* until Bosque Bonita.' That's one of the places where we are supposed to send out an outpost from Sierra Rôja."

"It's threatenin' the dirty scut is!" There was a look of immense satisfaction on Sergeant Bannion's face. "Now isn't that foine of him?"

"Excuse me, mister— It was a lank Yankee with a prominent Adam's apple which glided up and down his lean and scrawny throat, who spoke— "but why didn't the soldiers lambaste the hell outa them greasers?"

The crowd waited curiously, willing to suspend judgment until explanation was made.

"Orders from Washington forbid us to fire on Mexicans," Davies made reply with a shrug of his shoulders.

An incredulous murmur went up from the crowd.

"Do you mean to tell us that the damned greasers are goin' to be allowed to shoot us up and murder us any time they feel like it and the Army ain't goin' to do nothin' about it?"

"For the present it looks like it." Davies was laconic.

"But what's soldiers for?" Plainly the Yankee was nonplussed.

"Don't ask me, ask the people at Washington who give me my orders; all I do is to obey orders."

Davies, full of disgust at the false rôle in which he had been placed, turned on his heel and went out, followed by Sergeant Bannion, who still scowled angrily. A murmur grew behind them, an excited babble of voices.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY COURT MARTIAL

IT WAS a wondering and silent troop that marched out of the pleasant shade of the town into the heat of the road again. Rumors of the order requiring American forces to retire in the event of attack had seeped down to the men, but they had only been rumors. Here, before their eyes, had been indubitable proof—and the troopers were shocked and almost ready to doubt the evidence of their own senses. Of them all, Sergeant Bannion was the most upset. It had become almost a personal matter with him; he brooded over it. That Mexican bandits could fire upon Americans with impunity and go unpunished was something that he could not stomach.

Davies himself was morose, too morose to listen to the grumbling of the men riding two by two behind him. The road skirted the Rio Grande, not much of a stream, to be sure, but important as a boundary between that turbulent republic to the southward and this United States.

Every once in a while Davies would see Sergeant Bannion's eye scanning the op-

posite side of the river speculatively, and he wondered what the sergeant was thinking. There certainly must be a bitter feud on between Bannion and this fellow Gordino to have led to that carelessly scrawled note in Spanish pinned on the dead man's body. And this place, Bosque Bonita—what was that? He remembered seeing it on the map, placed close to the river edge, distant some forty miles from Sierra Roja. He would see that Sergeant Bannion was not placed too close to Bosque Bonita.

Here and there along the road were little Mexican dwellings, crudely built affairs of adobe mud and wattles, somnolent and silent in the sun, no sign of life around the small house and untidy garden with its corn and melon patch. Every one was sleeping through the heat of the day, that is every one except this long column of American soldiers, sent out to be targets for any wandering Mexican bandit who cared to shoot at them.

AT THE next ten minute halt, while men were straightening out saddle blankets and having a smoke, Bannion came up to Davies and stared across the river, his eyes shaded.

"Liftinent," he said, "sure and Oi belave we're bein' followed. Has the liftinent been noticin' that cloud o' dust acrost the strame—up there, beyant thim hills?" Bannion pointed to a low lying hill, distant from the far bank of the river some eight hundred or a thousand yards.

Reaching for his binoculars, Davies adjusted them on the point indicated. As the glasses settled on the distant hilltop the place seemed fairly to leap into the eye. There, plain as day, were the forms of eight or ten Mexicans, prone on the ground, watching the American troop. Behind them, at the hill crest, an occasional head would bob up. So clear was it that Davies, startled, lowered his glasses to call his men into action.

"They're there, all right," he told Bannion and the two stared at each other gravely.

"It's me good frind, Gordino," opined Sergeant Bannion simply.

"I wonder how many men he has with him?" mused Davies, and raised his field glasses again. Suddenly he dropped them from his hands so that they swung from the strap around his neck.

His hand flew to his lips. A sharp blast on the bronze whistle brought the men to their horses' heads.

"Mount!" he shouted. Men swarmed into the saddles.

"Form fours— Trot! E-e-eyow!" The long musical note of command stirred the troop into sudden activity; the long column closed in on itself.

"Forward! Gallop! E-e-y-o-ow!"

The troop surged forward at a thunderous gallop, following where Davies led them into the shelter of grove of cottonwood trees, fringing the northern side of a small hill. Scarcely had the troop moved from the place on which it had been standing dismounted when several little fountains of dust rose. There was the *whirr* and *thud* of bullets striking against hard ground. From far off on the other side of the river came a faint *rat-tat-tat-tat!*

"A machine gun!" Bannion snorted.

"Yes, I saw it through my glasses; they were just ranging it on us. There were about fifty men lined up there. Never again will I halt a troop on an exposed piece of road."

Davies was white and shaken with the narrow escape his men had had from being shot.

"But, Liftinent, that was the quickest bit o' thinkin' Oi've seen for many a day, gittin' the outfit outa there," comforted Sergeant Bannion, but it was small comfort to Davies. Here, twice in the same day, he had been ineffective and useless and his soul was bitter within him.

The *rat-tat-tat-tat* of that distant machine gun stopped. Working their way to the top of the small hill behind which the troop was concealed, Davies and Bannion focused their glasses on the Mexicans. There they were, out in plain view, their shadows long against the hill-

side, making no attempt at concealment. Evidently the bandits, of whom there seemed to be at least fifty or sixty, were arguing about something.

"Holy Hivin, if we could only lob a few rounds into the graceless scuts! Will ye look at the beauty of the target they prisint! Not over eight hundred ya-ards, a wo-onderful range at which to be shootin'," mourned Sergeant Bannion, "and a wonderful time of day in which to shoot."

It was late afternoon, when the harsh brilliance of the sun is a little dimmed, when the heat waves that distort targets and aiming points have passed away and the air is crystal clear.

"And it's a coort martial offense for an officer to be orderin' a shot fired at the graysers. Sure and if Oi had the responsibility Oi'd willin' take a coort martial. Pwhat's a coort martial to a non-commissioned orficer? Nawthin' at all, nawthin' at all." He looked sidewise at Davies.

Davies clenched his fists and did some hard thinking. Evidently these Mexicans under Gordino were following them. Sooner or later they would catch the troop and kill some of his men and horses. Sergeant Bannion in any case would only get a reprimand out of it. Was it a cowardly thing to pass the buck to a non-commissioned officer? It was not a cowardly thing to use any means within reason to save his men from wounds and death. One sharp lesson, and the bandits would let them alone. If they went unpunished, the nature of bandits being what it is, they would grow bolder and bolder and do more and more damage.

DAVIES walked down toward his horse.

"The troop is in your charge, Sergeant Bannion," he said firmly. "I am going to take two men and make a reconnaissance ahead for a mile or two. After twenty minutes you bring the troop up."

The two men looked at each other. An expression of almost unbelievable joy spread over Sergeant Bannion's face.

"Yis, sor." He saluted.

Davies had scarcely disappeared around the turn in the road when Bannion had the men off their horses and the horses of each platoon held by one man. Upon a wave of his hand, the dismounted men rolled up the hill, a long line of khaki clad figures. Without command they loaded. A faint breeze came up. Sergeant Bannion wet his finger and held it up.

"Ra-ange! Eight hunder ya-ards! Windage—one point right—at twilve o'clock—at the inimy—hould your breath you forsaken recruities; squaze your triggers as though your lives depinded upon it. Fire at will!"

And Bannion, studying the dusty hillside on the Mexican side of the river, heard the cracking, smashing roar of rifle fire and saw fountains of dust rise suddenly among the thickly crowded group of bandits on the hillside.

The Mexicans stood uncertainly for a space. One went down, then another, a third spun around like a top and fell flat on his face. With arms waving and heads bent low as against a rainstorm, the others began to flee to the nearest shelter.

But the troop was steadying down. Seventy rifles were vomiting a veritable leaden hail. The bandits dropped here and there, black figures against the brown hill. Men staggered and fell, others, almost over the hilltop, fell before they could reach the other side.

The dusty hillside was nearly bare of all living things. Quiet bundles of clothes, bundles that had been living men, dotted the ground, most of them about the abandoned machine gun.

Farther back, the Mexicans were scattering.

"Sivinteen, eighteen, nineteen, twinty—four and twinty, five and twinty—" Sergeant Bannion's voice was exultant as he counted the casualties before him.

"Cease firin'!" he shouted on a sudden. The rifle fire died down instantly.

"Pick up your empties," he shouted, and men gathered in the brass shells.

"To horse!" he commanded. In five minutes the troop had mounted and was on its way.

A half mile farther on Bannion saluted Davies, who waited at the side of the road.

"Sorr," Sergeant Bannion reported in a loud voice, "Sergeant Bannion r-e-ep-or-rts to the tr-r-ro-op commander that three minutes afther that tr-o-o-p commander had lift, a huge band of Mixicans r-rose suddenly out o' the side of the r-road and po-u-r-ed in a devastatin' fire into the troop. It was only be returnin' a hot fire that the min and the horses of this organi-zation was saved from overwhelmin' destruction."

The men behind Bannion grinned happily, like a pack of hounds newly returned from a kill. Sergeant Bannion's face was grave and officially stern. Davies' lips twitched slightly.

"Very well, Sergeant, I'll report the matter as a case of absolutely necessary action to save the lives of American soldiers."

The minor action was in the nature of a godsend to the troop of recruits. From gawky, gangling men, ill at ease in the strange habiliments of the soldier, the group of seventy men had swiftly coalesced into a fighting unit of capable, self-reliant soldiers. Behind him as he rode Davies could hear the steady, joyous hum of their voices, a deeper more resonant hum, the voices of men who had been in action and found it good.

THE STOP for the night was on the camping grounds of a troop of another regiment. As his troop rode into the place, Davies saw a tall, thin captain waiting to receive him.

He introduced himself and was welcomed.

"I've made arrangements for the supper of your men and their breakfast so that they won't have much to do. I think my men have invested heavily in beer for them." The captain led him to his tent where iced drinks were waiting.

The troop on the ground certainly took their duties as hosts very thoroughly. The men who had come into camp found wood and water awaiting them, a picket line already erected, and, most glorious of all, great G.I. cans filled with frosted bottles of beer snuggling in ice and water. Stables finished, the two troops had supper together.

Davies and the captain sat outside the latter's tent and smoked in the beatific silence which comes at the end of a good day's march, a good meal and all men and horses comfortable.

Some sort of an impromptu sing-song was in progress with the men.

"Hear you had a little brush with the bandits today," remarked the captain after a five minute silence.

Davies looked at him swiftly. The captain's face was bland and unconcerned.

"Why, yes," replied Davies easily, "it seems while I was away from the troop a few minutes, a bunch of bandits jumped them, and my sergeant had to use severe measures to drive them away."

"Yes, yes," said the captain, "in those cases I generally put the non-commissioned officer in arrest and try him myself. Of course, one can not condone the disobedience of War Department General Orders. And then," he added thoughtfully, "one can be certain that the non-commissioned officer will not be soaked a severe sentence by some one—not, ah—in touch with the—ah—real situation, or in sympathy with the non-commissioned officer. In fact, if the circumstances seem to justify it and the non-commissioned officer agrees to trial by summary court, one can sometimes find him not guilty."

Davies was silent and thoughtful for a space.

"To lend an air of verisimilitude to what otherwise might be a bald and unconvincing narrative, wouldn't it be better if some one else tried him. You, for example, are senior here."

"I'd be very glad to."

SERGEANT BANNION was sent for and arrived very shortly.

"I have—ah—to prefer a set of charges against you, Sergeant," Davies informed him.

"Sure and Oi know it, Liftinent. Oi tuk the liberty of writin' out a set for the liftinent's signature."

Bannion drew forth a summary court charge sheet from his pocket, a set of charges, lacking nothing except the officer's signature. Davies affixed his name to this.

The captain asked him whether he waived his right to be tried by a higher court. He did.

How did he plead to the charges of disregard of War Department Orders?

Not guilty.

What were the circumstances?

Sergeant Bannion told them with a wealth of circumstantial detail worthy of Dumas at his best. The captain tried to keep a straight face. Davies turned his head away once or twice. The trial was concluded.

"I find the disregard of orders justified and the accused is hereby judged not guilty and released from arrest," stated the captain solemnly.

Sergeant Bannion saluted and retired, serious eyes and grave of mien.

"*That,*" remarked the captain, "should stop the most pestiferous of inspector generals. How many of the greasers did you account for?"

"I heard the men say about twenty-four or five."

The tall thin captain nodded his approval.

"Which will make them stop, look and listen awhile before starting anything with the Army along this neck of the woods," he remarked, "and really calls for a drink."

"Another drink," suggested Davies, and raised his glass. "Here's how!"

The captain paused and put his glass down.

"Mr. Davies—" his voice was extremely serious and solemn—"ride rough shod over all the regulations you can get away with and your sins may or may not be forgiven you. But never break customs of the Service, customs as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, for that will not be forgiven you."

"Wha-what have I done?" Davies looked startled.

"No suggestion of a previous drink should ever be mentioned between gentlemen. The correct expression is, 'have a drink' no matter how many may or may not have been imbibed. Secondly," went on the captain, "no one in the regular Service should ever say 'here's how'. Leave that for the civilian soldier and the colonel on the governor's staff. The regular Army man says 'how', immutably, finally and comprehensively, as his ancient foeman, the Indian chiefs, said it."

Such is the superior weight of custom as opposed to mere orders. Davies, for the first time that day, felt that he had really committed a serious breach and went to bed swearing to himself never again to offend.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BAITED WAGON

EARLY the next morning the troop began its preparations for the day's march. Davies could not help but observe the increased speed and smoothness with which they broke camp and packed their saddles and made their horses ready. He remarked upon it to Sergeant Bannion.

"Sure and a day on the m-ar-rch is worth a wake in garrison for the makin' of sodgers," commented that worthy. "Ye see the min is already larnin' to help each other."

Davies saw that, in truth, tentmates were aiding each other in putting the heavily packed saddle on the horses' backs, two men working like a small team, quietly and efficiently.

The long lean captain watched them.

"Shaping up pretty well for a recruit troop," he commented, "but you'll have

to watch them on patrol duty. When green soldiers get out alone they don't take care of the horses, and don't take much care of themselves. That's a bad sector you're going to. I think this fellow Gordino has his headquarters opposite your patrol district. He's trying to raise funds for Villa's comeback and using every dodge to do it, smuggling through dope and everything else. Better not send out any weak patrols—and watch your camps just before dawn. He'll jump you if he can."

With the captain's admonitions to think over during the day's march, Davies' troop pulled out, sending his four line escort wagon on ahead as usual. Men were getting accustomed to the routine of the march and the horses stepped out, heads up and tails up, eagerly sniffing the crisp morning air.

Davies was vaguely worried about something. His troop was all there right behind him and everything seemed all right, but his wagon was ahead unprotected and alone and with no one to guard it except the driver and the cook.

"I don't like our escort wagon being so far ahead, unprotected, Sergeant Bannion," he remarked.

The sergeant shook his head.

"It ain't our escort wagon, Liftinent. Our escort wagon is s-aafe behint the troop a matther of foive hunder yards or so wid eight good min ridin' wid it."

Davies looked startled. He was certain he had seen his own wagon pull out, but then, one escort wagon looks very much like another and for that matter so does one mule skinner.

"But whose wagon is that on ahead?" he asked, mystified.

"It is the troop's we jest lift. Some o' their byes wanted to do a bit of huntin'—" Sergeant Bannion's face was innocent of all guile—"and they asked their captain could they take the wagon and their guns. He says yis, not askin' at all at all, why the byes should want to use Springfield rifles for huntin' dooks." Here Sergeant Bannion permitted himself the ghost of a smile. "At any rate, there they be, lyin' up all snug and quiet in the bottom of that impty wagon, their rifles, riddy for anny wanderin' bandits that gets rambunctious and wishful for throuble. Ye see, it's in the na-a-atchure of a deecoy, Liftinent."

"I see."

Davies nodded, seeing at the same time that this secretive and quick thinking Irishman was in the nature of a gift from the gods. The old devil had probably cooked up the scheme and won the cooperation of his hosts the night before on the strength of three or four bottles of beer.

ON THE far side of the Rio Grande a battered and worn remnant of what had started out as a proud detachment of the Escolta del Oro had come trailing into a mud daubed and exceedingly dirty Mexican village. The leader of the defeated remnant dismounted from his horse and went, trembling, to report to his chief.

A slender, cold eyed man, in silver mounted sombrero and black velvet suit, lounged on a brilliantly colored *serape* thrown carelessly over a box of looted goods in the interior of the town's one *tienda*. The swarthy leader of the detachment reported to him.

"My chief," he stuttered, "we followed directions. Placing the machine gun to cover the road we trained it on the gringo army of which there were at least a thousand men. My chief, we killed several hundred of them with the accurate and deadly fire of our machine gun and they fled like the cowards they are. But such is the vile duplicity of the gringoes that scarcely had we finished firing when a veritable army of them, coming from some new direction, attacked us savagely with machine guns, artillery and all manner of bombs. We fought until dark, holding them off by the most wonderful heroism, but losing many men. I have to report the death of Major Santandor, Captain José Maria Fuente, Captain Manuelo de Souza and twenty men—and—and— Mercy! My chief! Mercy!"

The tall form of Gordino rose from the *serape*, his eyes unwinking and cold, like the eyes of a reptile. His hand slid down to his side and returned, holding a revolver.

"Dog! You lie!" he said very quietly. With as much feeling as one displays when lighting a cigaret, he shot down the leader of the defeated detachment. The man fell with a shriek and twisted convulsively until he straightened out with a shudder and lay quiet.

Gordino looked at the body without emotion and carefully ejected the empty shell, blew through the barrel and placed in a fresh cartridge.

"Drag out this carrion!" he called, and men came and took away the body, stolid and unconcerned.

To others of the defeated command he gave scathing reprimands, between a rapid fire of questions which they answered, terror writ large in their eyes.

"You say it is their custom to send ahead their wagon without escort?" he shot at one man.

"*Sí, sí!* Alone with but two men on the driver's seat," the quaking fellow made answer.

"Hear then," commanded Gordino, "at least you dogs and sons of dogs can capture a wagon protected by two men. You will go forth immediately and bring back that wagon with the animals unhurt. Get fresh horses and go forth at once."

So it was that a small column of some twenty-five men, weary and red eyed from fatigue, cantered forth from the adobe village, heading for the Rio Grande, the little river that divided them from that great silent, mysterious gringo nation to the north.

Gordino sat alone in his quarters, scowling deeply. A knock at the door aroused him.

A barefooted peon entered.

"My chief," he reported, "the gringo prisoner wishes to know if it is your intention to starve him?"

The gringo prisoner! Gordino had nearly forgotten him. His face flamed with hatred. His men had captured the man below Sierra Roja, on the American side, a lone rancher riding to town.

Calling to one of his lieutenants, Gordino gave some swift instructions.

"You will not then take him to the Corral of Death, my chief?"

Gordino shook his head. The lieutenant left.

DOWN at the end of the one street of the village was a heavily batted adobe shack. Within it, cursing all things Mexican, sat Tom Jerrold, wondering whether his wife were dead or alive. He had left to get the doctor, some fifteen miles hard riding, there and back. It was to be their first baby and Mrs. Jerrold was alone with no one to care for her except a half blind old Mexican woman.

He had raged and begged and pleaded with the bandits who had stepped out of the chaparral with leveled rifles. Obdurate, they had bound him and brought him across the Rio Grande.

The creaking of the door interrupted his train of thought.

A smiling faced *teniente* of Gordino's tattered forces came in.

"A thousand pardons, señor, for keeping you so long without food; the chief has given me this money to give you. You will find a Chino restaurant at the end of the street. It is understood that you will make no attempt to escape."

"Sure, sure," mumbled Jerrold, who had not eaten for twenty-four hours.

He shambled forth into the street. The light blinded him somewhat, the glare of the sun against the white powdered alkali dust being too strong for eyes which had been in the gloom of an adobe cell for hours.

As his eyesight grew stronger he noticed several of Gordino's officers across the street. They were smiling over something and vaguely he wondered what the joke was about. The smiling *teniente* who had brought him the silver peso pointed down the street.

At the end of the street he could see the

shack which housed the Chino restaurant. To reach it he had to pass the group of officers lined up on the side of the road. They seemed to have spread out as though awaiting a parade or exhibition of some sort. Again he noticed their smiles. Some of them were laughing as though vastly amused by something.

He was nearly opposite them now.

It was only when he heard one of them say "Now!" and saw the revolvers drawn, that Tom Jerrold realized that he would never see Mrs. Jerrold again nor ever know whether the expected new arrival would be a boy or a girl.

It was a little messy, because few of them could shoot. But it must be said that Tom met death with a calm eye. Even after he had been dropped with a bullet through his knee and two or three through his body he called them a set of greaser dogs and could only be quieted by a bullet through the ear, at close range. Laughing, the bandits continued to fire into the body.

The infamous *ley de fuga* had made Mrs. Jerrold a widow a day after she had become a mother.

Gordino came out and joined the group of giggling officers.

Long and silently he stared at the body, his thoughts far away.

Then he turned to his officers.

"Half the booty we capture for the following month and a promotion to second in command to the man or officer who brings me that gringo soldier Bannion," he announced, "but he must be alive!"

THERE was little chattering in the group of bandits who had been sent forth to capture the troop wagon. All night they had lain watching the American camp where the two troops had foregathered and celebrated. Stiff and sore, they mounted at dawn and circled back in the hills, keeping well ahead of the lone wagon which set forth first from camp.

Whipping their horses, they galloped some three miles up the road where the white and dusty ribbon of thoroughfare wound through a large grove of cottonwoods.

Concealed among these, they waited, sitting in their saddles.

The minutes passed. Strain their ears as they might they could hear nothing. Their horses were restless.

Suddenly their ears were smitten with a long drawn and curdling racket coming from the direction of the approaching Americans.

"*E-e-e-ye-a-a-a-awl E-e-e-e-e-y-a-a-a-a-awl*" thrice repeated.

For a second their faces blanched, then one of them laughed silently.

"It is the singing of the great mules of the gringoes."

They smiled and gripped their rifles firmly. Very confident and carefree they were there. To bring back this lone and unprotected wagon would a little reinstate them in the good graces of their chief.

In whispers they speculated as to what might be the contents of the wagon so near their grasp.

"Much ammunition, for one thing, very many boxes of good food and many useful things," they agreed.

"Sh-sh!"

Some one warned them to keep silent. They pressed forward among the trees. Now they could hear the creak of the wheels and the voices of the driver and his companion.

Suddenly they heard the brakes being applied and the wagon came to a stop. Surprised, they stared at one another.

All was silent except for the sound of the mules shifting in their traces.

The leader of the bandits beckoned them. Moving very quietly, they walked their horses toward the wagon, keeping within the shelter of the trees. In a minute they came within view of it, standing there, a great, high vehicle, covered with a huge canvas top.

There was no sign of life about. The two men on the box had strangely disappeared. Evidently the task was to be easier than the bandits dreamed.

Throwing all caution to the winds, they

galloped up to the wagon, laughing in their glee.

The laughter died out with sickening suddenness. For strangely enough, the sides of the wagon had lifted and they were staring into the muzzles of eight rifles.

And then came a burst of fire that stilled the laughter of six of them forever. The remainder turned and fled, two more falling before they reached the shelter of the thicker woods.

Riderless horses plunged and galloped through the woods; the bandits screamed as they fled. Out of the twelve who escaped only six were unwounded.

"That had orter teach them to lay off monkeyin' with American Army wagons."

The driver and his assistant crawled back on to the seat from which they had retired when their mules lifted their heads and hee-hawed. The men in the body of the empty wagon piled out and looked over the dead.

It was there that Davies found them when he trotted up with the troop. From afar off they could hear a distant screaming and the crash of wildly stampeding horses.

Sergeant Bannion looked over the scene with great satisfaction.

"Is ut another coort martial ye hov for me, Liftinent?" he asked. "Sure and this is woorth at least a gineral coort and proud Oi would be to stand on me hind legs before them and till thim of this day's wu-r-rk."

A pitiful and chattering remnant of the bandits returned to the village. It was noticeable that the ones who reported to Gordino crossed themselves before going before him. But their chief said nothing. He received the story of their failure in grim silence.

Calling his officers together he addressed them, his eyes strained and wolfish looking.

"We will move to the headquarters opposite Bosque Bonita," he said. "I will divide half the treasure we have on hand and half the treasure we capture in the next three months with the man who brings me this gringo Bannion, *alive!*"

CHAPTER IX

MERRY MAJOR CRANSTON

DAVIES brought his men into camp without further incident. This night they were to remain with another troop, an outfit commanded by a lieutenant, a silent, shy looking youngster with an attractive smile. He made Davies welcome. His men had provided for the hospitable reception and entertainment of the visiting troop, entertainment which included refreshments, a boxing match and a baseball game.

As the troop had arrived at noon there was plenty of time for all this. A good dinner was awaiting the guests. Dinner and stables once finished and camp made shipshape, Sergeant Bannion picked up a baseball team from the troop and every one except the men on guard and the kitchen force, repaired to the baseball diamond.

Sergeant Bannion pitched for the troop and Davies marveled at the skill of the non-commissioned officer, for the game ended in tie score which was played off, resulting in two home runs for Davies' team. Their opponents had been defeated by the excellence of Sergeant Bannion's pitching, that old-timer having wound himself up and put a succession of fast ones past every man at bat. The men of the two troops went back to camp, followed by Davies and the lieutenant, their host, both sides flushed and excited over the tense game.

From the preparations in the camp, Davies judged that their hosts were going to hold a smoker that night. The presence of several barrels of beer and innumerable boxes of cigars, the air of importance worn by the cooks, and the squawks of countless chickens being butchered to make a soldier holiday, gave evidence that their hosts were going to do it up in style.

To Davies, these inter-troop and inter-

regimental foregatherings were a surprising delight. He had imagined that the hard boiled, prosaic, regular Army had no time for such jollities. But he was to find that the old line regiments of the Army were very strongly individualized. Like individuals, they had particular friends, other regiments in the Service. For example, the regiment to which their host's troop belonged and Davies' own regiment had for several generations treasured a tradition of particular friendship. Always when they came together a party resulted and the old-timers of both outfits recalled previous parties here and there around the world, on the plains of Texas, under the walls of old Manila, in the streaming jungles of Mindanao, or in Cuba. In the regimental histories were records of parties held in the Mexican and Civil wars.

In other ways the regiments showed their marked individuality, each having some point of fancied superiority of which officers and men were quietly proud. Davies' regiment, for example, was a little "dressy"; officers and men went in for a little more careful attention to appearance, shaving every day in the field and breaking out on very slight excuse into yellow silk neckerchiefs. In garrison the younger officers always wore the well cut breeches and snappy patent leather boots of the mounted dress uniform, while officers of other regiments contented themselves with wearing the long blue trousers which in no way distinguished them from their contemporaries in the dismounted services.

The regiment to which their host belonged had a long tradition of Border service behind them. They affected the roughness and readiness of the plainsman, scorned razors once the confines of the post were past, and affected fearful and wonderful beards to the horrified amazement of visiting and alien inspector generals. In the absence of said inspector generals, the men substituted the hair lariat of the plains for their own issue rope and troop commanders said naught.

Some of these matters were told to Davies by the lieutenant, his host, in explanation of the rather fuzzy appearance of his men. Others Davies gathered by inference.

Among other traditions in his own regiment Davies found a very salutary one, which insisted than no officer was ever to be caught asleep on the job. So thoroughly was this ingrained in the officers that many a carousing bachelor party, arriving at their quarters an hour or two before reveille, would solemnly pace around and around the outside of the bachelor building rather than risk going to sleep and missing formation.

As their marked individuality led each regiment to select particular friends among other regiments, so did it lead to the selection of particular enemies. And as certain regiments had many friends, so certain others were like Ishmael in the wilderness; every man's hand was against them.

One poor regiment in particular, which shall be nameless, had managed at one time or another to gain the ill will of every regiment in the cavalry service. Its meetings with another outfit were marked by fist fights between the men and acrimonious exchange of repartee between the officers. The somewhat arrogant and boastful regimental marching song of this Ishmael outfit was parodied by other regiments in a discreditable and Rabelasian version sung with huge delight by every mess in the Service.

"You've one of their representatives in your outfit, your Major Cranston," the lieutenant informed Davies. "He is an old member of the unmentionables. He's been trying for months to get back to them."

"They're welcome to him," Davies remarked.

"They don't want him and you have to hand it to them on that."

The two officers walked across the camp to where enthusiastic volunteers from both troops were placing the beer barrels in strategic position and placing bales of hay around as tables.

THE FESTIVITIES commenced with due regard to the form and ceremony governing such matters.

The first sergeant of the troop which acted as host called for silence when all were assembled. Rising, tin cup of beer in hand, he welcomed the visiting representatives of the other regiment in a dignified and stately speech, finally calling upon all to drink to the health of their guests, a suggestion enthusiastically followed by his men.

As was befitting, Sergeant Bannion rose to make reply, sweeping his audience along with him in a flood of Celtic idiom and fluent, graceful wit that brought all to their feet.

And then the serious drinking commenced, interspersed with speeches, impromptu recitals and songs, lustily shouted and happily disregardful of words and tune but making a fine soul stirring clamor.

Beautiful impartiality was shown in the selection of the songs and recitals. "Christopher Colombo Who Thought The World Was Roundo" alternated with classic recital seldom committed to paper for very good reasons, a poetical effusion having to do with a certain lady named Lil.

"When they start 'Sweet Adeline' we'd better haul freight," advised the lieutenant, knowing of yore that a party is fast reaching its climax when that adenoidal harmony is dragged forth. A party is a party and the officer who knows his stuff will quietly withdraw from soldier parties to the end that joy will be unrestrained by any official presence.

UNFORTUNATELY the camp of this troop was close to the railroad.

Just about the time that "Sweet Adeline" began to make her ladylike presence known, the train stopped and from it with the aid of an obsequious porter, descended a pursy, proud and important looking major. As the noise of the disappearing train died down he stopped, puzzled, on the small platform. From the direction whence could be seen the brown tents of the soldiers' camp, came the roar as of many men engaged in unlawful uprising against superior authority. There had been no diner on the train which carried the major and his bag from El Paso. The trip had been tiresome and dusty. There was no one at the station to carry his bag. He was tired and thirsty.

The uproar from the camp grew in volume as he trudged along the dusty road, carrying his heavy suitcase. A magisterial frown creased the major's brow as nearer view disclosed the party in all its glory.

By this time Sergeant Bannion had just completed a striking rendition of another famous ballad, a ballad which cast very serious implications upon the ancestry of a certain king of England, a ballad moreover which is reputed to have been composed by a famous English poet who lost the poet laureateship thereby. Being meant only for rendition in the great wide open spaces where men are men and there are no sensitive ears to be shocked, Major Cranston heard the ribald words with considerable of a shock.

"Disgusting!" he snorted aloud, and forgot to return the salute of the bearded sentry who guarded the entrance to the camp.

"Disgusting," gritted Major Cranston as he saw Sergeant Bannion lead out in a wild snake dance followed by all the men.

Striding toward the officers' tent, he suddenly came upon Davies and the young lieutenant sitting very quietly over a tin cup of beer apiece.

Both young officers rose politely but without any marked enthusiasm and greeted him.

"What is the meaning of this disgraceful scene?" The major's face was nearly purple with anger as he pointed back to where the festivities were at their height.

"My troop is giving a party for Lieutenant Davies' troop, sir." The young lieutenant was very polite.

"It's a damn' disgrace, worthy of a mob like your cavalry!" exploded Cranston.

The lieutenant stiffened slightly. The major was by way of being his guest, uninvited and undesired it is true, but nevertheless his guest.

"I have no authority over you, young man, but I will report the matter to your regimental commander and trust that he will take disciplinary action proper to the circumstances. But as for you—" He turned on Davies—"you may consider yourself in arrest and relieved of command."

Davies turned pale. Over the shoulder of the major he saw the young lieutenant's eye upon him. As he watched, the left eyelid of his host fluttered in an unmistakable wink. There was something infinitely comforting about that wink. Davies took fresh heart.

"Very well, sir." He bowed his head.

The three men stood in some uncertainty. What to do when an unexpected guest arrives unannounced and puts another guest in arrest and threatens the host makes a problem. The lieutenant solved it by quietly effacing himself with a muttered excuse. He hurried to Sergeant Bannion. The two held a whispered colloquy.

The lieutenant returned. After a moment he was followed by Sergeant Bannion, who bore a large quart measure such as cooks use. But the large quart measure was beaded with drops of cold moisture. Fluffily reposing on its rim was an unmistakable foam, foam which promises cool and refreshing satisfaction of thirst underneath.

The major was hot and dusty and thirsty. He looked with longing eyes upon Sergeant Bannion.

"Sure and Major, we're deloited to see the maj-or-r," Sergeant Bannion's voice would have talked a hangman out of springing the trap. "Oi thot maybe the maj-o-rr wad be havin' a bit of thi-rrst afther his long and fatiguin' thrip—" and Bannion handed the beer to the pompous little man.

The flesh and the spirit struggled for a second. It is not within the bounds of human fortitude to refuse a graciously tendered quart of beer on a hot afternoon in Texas after a grueling ride on a dusty train.

The flesh triumphed. The major took the beer. Visibly he exuded satisfaction as the cooling liquid gurgled down his parched throat. That Bannion had spiked the beer with a generous slug of whisky no one knew except Bannion.

ON AN empty stomach a quart of beer will sometimes loosen the tongue and thicken the understanding. When one has privily added to that same beer nearly a half pint of the best whisky the result is almost foreordained.

The harshness fled from the major's eye. Something faintly akin to a look of benignity took its place. Somehow the lieutenant had returned. A chair was drawn up for the new arrival. He sat down with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Guess I was jush—just a li'l hasty," remarked the major, not looking at the other two. "We'll all forget it, eh?"

He smiled a cloudy and dreamy smile, and tipped the quart measure again, putting it down at last with visible sorrow that the bottom of the container had been reached. A signal from the lieutenant and suddenly the tin quart measure was whisked away to be returned refilled.

"'S beautiful song they're singin'." The major waved a tolerant hand toward where the men's voices were raised in "Sweet Adeline." "Uset to sing a mean baritone to thash tune," the major informed them solemnly and listened again, visibly yearning to join in.

Beating time on the top of the folding table with the tin measure, he crooned the melody softly to himself. Sergeant Bannion, coming again, heard the sound. In his eyes came a great light.

"Wouldn't the maj-oo-rr say a few rema-a-arrks to the min?" he wheedled.

The major would.

"Allwaysh believe in innoshent merriment so longs it doesn't interfere wish regula-ashons," announced the major firmly and rose and went forth to where the fun was thickest.

The young officers heaved a sigh of relief.

"An ambassadorship to the Court of St. James's would be too small a job for Sergeant Bannion's talents," said the lieutenant softly.

"Much too restricted for his genius," agreed Davies.

"Being Secretary of State at Washington wouldn't even give him full scope for his extraordinary qualities," supplemented the lieutenant.

"Do you suppose he spiked the beer he gave to the old fool?"

"It's my own private opinion that he put the hind leg of a mule in it; did you ever see a frosty old codger dissolve so fast in your life?" They both laughed silently.

Down where the men caroused, the major, leaning for support against a bale of hay, spoke at length of the duties of soldiers and the responsibilities of officers. After the first few words, the troopers politely returned to their own activities. The major spoke on at great length, totally oblivious of the fact that his audience was engaged elsewhere. At intervals Sergeant Bannion refilled the quart measure.

"First, last and all the time, the regulations," concluded the major, his eyes dreamy, his forefinger illustrating his points somewhat wavily.

"Hurrah for the regulations!" shouted some wag who had caught the last few words.

Three cheers were accordingly held for the regulations, three cheers very soothing to the major's *amour propre*. About that time the soldiers were willing to cheer for anything, even the regulations.

"Shergeant Bunion, you're a finesh firsh shergeant in a whole Army," announced the major suddenly.

"Bannion is the name, sorr, and thank ye very kindly f'r the compliment," returned Sergeant Bannion, doing things to the tin quart measure.

"I am not one to shtand on my rank, Shergeant Hannigan," declaimed the major solemnly and with feeling, being in truth scarcely able to stand on his legs, "nor am I one to take adshvantagsh of shuperior birth and posheshion—" and the major stopped, forgetting what important climax this weighty prelude was to lead up to.

"And the moor credit to ye, Maj-o-orr. The name, be the way, is Bannion, spelled with a Bay."

"The Army needs more men like you, Shergeant Ban-Ban—Banana, men with deshent reshpect f'r regula-a-shons. Have to watsh that offisher of yoursh, Shergeant, 's killin' too many Mexshicans. I shays to colonel, 'Court martial the pup,' I shays; colonel shays, 'No, don wanna court martial anybody. Go up and keep an eye on 'im,' shays colonel, 'Getta hell outa here,' shays colonel likewish, very rude mansh the colonel." Major Cranston wagged his head sadly. "Whad y' think of that, shays that to me, a major, 'getta hell outa here!' "

Sergeant Bannion looked very swiftly at the clouded eye and wobbly knees of the officer before him.

"Roight here, sir."

He lent a capable arm and eased the form of the major on to the bale of hay, where sleep overtook the overburdened soul and spent body of the squadron commander.

"Coort martial the pup, is ut?" growled Bannion vengefully. "Shure and Oi wish it was rat poison Oi'd put in your beer instid of good Four Roses Whusky. Spakin' o' coort martials, ye c'd be coort-martialed y'rsilf tin times over f'r the exhibition ye've made of yoursilf this day, ye swaggerin' Galway rooster."

The major slumbered on, oblivious, while Bannion strode away, his brow black with anger and some slight worry. It was going to be rough sledding with this nosey and interfering major.

"He'll most probably be the cause of many a betther mon than hisself chewin'

mournful like on th' wrong ind of a bullet," reflected the sergeant.

CHAPTER X

THE CAMPAIGN GROUND

"WHAT'S the matter, Sergeant, can't you wake up the major?" Davies stood at the head of the troop next morning, the men all standing to horse, ready to move out. For ten minutes they had waited while the first sergeant had tried unsuccessfully to rouse the slumbering Major Cranston.

"If it wasn't for the loud snoring of him, Oi'd say he was dead," Bannion shook his head. "Oi shuk him wance, sayin' the trup was ready to march and he groans, 'March and be damned!' and turns over and goes to slape agin."

"Well, let's march and be damned." Davies swung into the saddle, and gave the signal for "mount". The troopers followed suit; the long column straightened out as the horses closed in; men settled themselves into the saddles. Goodbys were exchanged with their hosts of the night before and the day's march was started.

Ahead of them lay Sierra Roja at the end of the hike, with all that the place might contain of excitement and trouble. Davies was silent as he thought over the problems before him, problems complicated by the presence of Major Cranston who would probably follow up on the train and be there to meet them when they arrived.

The small advance guard was well out to the front and flanks. About an hour after they had started the march, one of the connecting files rode back, stating that there was a lone horseman approaching them from the opposite direction. Not five minutes later another messenger reported that he was a civilian, white and wearing a badge.

Two minutes later another messenger reported that the lone horseman was a customs guard.

"The advance guard is on its toes this morning."

Davies grinned at the thoroughness of the information sent him, and looked up as the stranger came in view, a heavily built man, bearded, and wearing a huge Stetson and leather chaps, a cartridge belt and revolver slung carelessly over one hip.

It was time for the hourly halt. The men slid off their horses and the column divided down the center, men leading their horses to the nearest side of the road and examining packs and blankets before sitting down to a smoke and a chat.

The stranger dismounted near Davies and came walking up with that peculiar stiff legged rolling walk of the man who has spent most of his waking hours in the saddle.

"Howdy, officer."

The stranger was saturnine and laconic, a quiet eyed man of middle age. Davies admired the man; he carried authority upon his shoulders like a mantle; self-confident strength was written on the set of his shoulders and the level direct gaze of his eyes.

"I'm Rogers of the customs," announced the newcomer, and squatted easily on his heels.

Davies offered him a cigaret which he refused politely, taking out a piece of black plug cut from which he sliced a generous chunk and placed it in his mouth.

"Understand you're goin' to Sierra Roja," the customs man went on.

"Those are my orders." Davies nodded.

"It ain't any too soon," was the customs man's comment.

Davies waited.

"This bird Gordino has moved his main body on the other side of the river below Sierra Roja, about opposite Bosque Bonita on the river."

Drawing forth his map, Davies studied the places, then asked some questions concerning the country and the trails. The customs man gave him the information and corrected some of the inaccuracies of the map.

"You got a man named Bannion?" Rogers asked.

Davies nodded. Rogers said nothing.

"Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing, only this Gordino is shore anxious to git him. He's offered a reward of two thousand pesos for anybody who'll capture Bannion and bring him in alive. It's none o' my business, only you'd better tell your man to go kinda careful. There's plenty o' greasers up and down this here river that 'ud sell their own brothers for ten pesos Mex—and a few white men who'd do the same, only those particular white men would throw in their mothers for good measure."

"How many men has Gordino with him over there?"

"Near's I can figger out he's got anywheres from two hundred to three hundred. And a choice collection o' scalawags they are, most of them the offscourins' of all the jails in Mexico. They call this outfit the Escolra del Oro and they're Villa's bodyguard when he's fightin'."

"Where is Villa now?"

"Nobody knows. He's gettin' up a new army to fight Huerta. This Escolta del Oro is fightin' Orozco. They captured about forty o' Orozco's men the other day. Gordino took 'em to his Corral of Death and did away with them."

"Where is this Corral of Death?"

"I don't know for sure. It's somewhere the other side of the river below Bosque Bonita. The greasers are all scared of it. I guess some gawdawful things happen there at that."

"What kind of a place is Bosque Bonita?"

"Nothin' but a little patch o' woods near the river bank and an old abandoned shack or stable or two."

Davies called Sergeant Bannion and told him the gist of the information he'd received from the river man.

"And Oi'm worth two thousand pesos is ut to that murdherin' scut?" Bannion was amused, "Shure and it's powerful reckless he's gettin' wid all his stolen money."

Rogers, the customs man, smiled for the first time when he heard the broad Irish brogue of the old sergeant.

"But don't make the mistake of bein' careless with that fellow Gordino. He's no man to be trifled with."

"Sergeant Bannion knows that; last time the sergeant trifled with him, Gordino went to the hospital for two weeks," Davies interpolated dryly.

The customs man looked at Bannion with new respect.

"But sure he's no mon to be triflin' wid," agreed Sergeant Bannion thoughtfully, "a fine upstanding figger of a mon he is at that, a handsome grayser if iver there was wan. Yeh," Bannion went on, "the koind of a handsome mon thot looks his handsomest seen through the rear sight of a rifle!"

"He captured Tom Jerrold, a young rancher up Sierra Roja way, a few days ago and had him shot like a dog by a gang of his officers—the *ley de fuga.* And Mrs. Jerrold was having a baby. Tom was trying to get to the doctor when he was captured. The people around Sierra Roja are pretty mad."

The customs man rose and mounted his horse.

"Well, so long," he waved, "glad to see you comin'. We sure do need the soldiers pretty bad around that part of the country." He was gone.

IT WAS late that afternoon when, hot, tired and dusty, the troop pulled into Sierra Roja. There, sitting at ease on the platform of the general store, was Major Cranston, his *pince-nez* fixed firmly on his nose, the black ribbon dangling somewhat dispiritedly. Gone was the benign look of yesterday. Far from having had the effect of removing some of his austere importance, his slight lapse from grace of the day before only succeeded in intensifying it.

"You will put your troop into camp and report to me immediately, Mr. Davies," he ordered.

A camp site offered itself at the edge

of town, near the railroad track. The temporary picket line, formed of the lariats carried by the men, was laid down, horses were unsaddled and packs lined up. There was little to do until the wagon arrived with the camp equipment except groom the horses.

Returning to the general store, from the shady porch of which the major refused to remove himself, Davies saluted and was invited to pull up a chair.

Unrolling a topographic map of the surrounding country, Major Cranston pointed out the territory the troop was to patrol.

"Here are Bosque Bonita and Ojos Calientes on the river," he stated importantly. "You will place an outpost of sixteen men at Bosque Bonita and another outpost of ten men at Ojos Calientes; the remainder of the troop will remain here at Sierra Roja."

"But, Major," objected Davies, a worried frown on his forehead, "that Bosque Bonita place is some forty miles from Sierra Roja and Ojos Calientes is nearly as far—and the two places are distant ten or twelve miles from each other on the river."

The major frowned impatiently, but Davies went on:

"There is a strong force of Mexicans on the opposite side. If they should attack Bosque Bonita the nearest help would be forty miles away. That outpost would be killed or captured. The outpost at Ojos Calientes can not get in touch with them as the country between the two is almost impassable—"

"The map shows it as being passable."

"But I've learned that the map is wrong."

"A United States Topographic Survey map is never wrong," stated the major in a voice that admitted no contradiction. "These are your orders and that is the way in which they will be carried out. That's all. I will remain here in town; you may detail me an orderly. I've found quarters with the man who runs the pool hall."

There was nothing but to obey orders. Davies departed, cursing the interfering policy that would not let an officer dispose his own troop in the most effective manner for this sort of duty.

Returning to camp, he found the wagon arrived and men unloading.

He called Sergeant Bannion aside and the two went over the map.

"It's a bad business, Liftinent." Bannion shook his head. "That is sure suicide to be kapin' a handful o' min out there far from any hilp in time o' nade."

The two studied the map in silence for many minutes.

"There's nawthin' to do but go forth and return wid our shields or upon 'em," Bannion said with a sigh, but Davies' eyes had narrowed as he studied the map.

"I think I know a way out," he stated. "I'll think it over and we'll try it. Maybe it'll result in a court-martial for me, but at least it will keep our men from getting shot up."

Bannion looked up and shook his head.

"Don't be takin' chances on that Maj-o-rr Cranston," he warned. "He is a la-a-d that carries around spare court-martial poipers in his pocket as the ord'ry mon carries around spare cigaret poipers."

"Can't be helped; we'll have to risk it. As I read him, he'll never get on a horse and ride all that distance under any circumstance."

"Thot's one thing can be dipinded upon, anyways," agreed the sergeant.

A SUDDEN commotion down at the entrance to the camp raised the heads of both men. A boy had ridden in on a foam flecked horse, which gasped and trembled, evidently driven beyond its strength. Soldiers were crowded around the rider. Davies saw them pointing toward his tent.

"Let's see what's up," he suggested to Sergeant Bannion. The two made their way to the excited crowd of soldiers. Davies heard his men cursing.

"It's a shame!" one cried.

"We'd ought to go down and hang them!" another one asserted.

"Hanging's too good for 'em!" a third objected.

"What's it all about?" asked Davies quietly. All the men started to answer at once.

"They killed them—burned the house—took away all the animals—"

"Atten-shun!" sang out Bannion's roar.

An instant silence dropped like a blanket on the babbling of the crowd.

"Now, what's your tale, la-ad?" inquired the sergeant of the white faced and sweat stained boy.

"Please sir, Ah, was ridin' by Missa Jerrold's, down near Bosque Bonita and Ah seen a bunch o' greasers ride up and shoot the place and set it afire. That's all Ah seen and I came up here's fast as I could. They headed up this way. Ah think they intend for to shoot up the folks at the Hayden ranch."

"How many of them was they?" asked Bannion.

"About twenty—twenty-five."

"How far is this Hayden ranch?"

"About half way to Bosque Bonita."

"Give the la-ad food and drink and look afther his horse," ordered the sergeant, and turned expectantly toward Davies.

There was only one thing to be done. Both men nodded. Then they both turned and looked back down the town's one street where, comfortable in the shade of the general store's porch, lounged the paunchy figure of the major.

"Turn out the first and second platoons, replace the tired men and horses with fresh ones," ordered Davies swiftly, his eyes alight, "full pack. Have my horse saddled and blankets taken from the bedding roll and rolled on the saddle; two days' rations all around."

His orders came like the snapping of a whip. With his first words the men around him melted away like snow before the sun of summer and ran to pack their saddles. Sergeant Bannion nodded briefly and saluted, hurrying away to carry out the orders. In a second his whistle rang through the camp, his voice boomed out his commands.

Davies walked down toward the general store and took a deep breath as he approached the major.

CHAPTER XI

MESSENGER OF GORDINO

"BUT I don't see why it is necessary to take out your outposts today." The major's voice was peevish and irritable.

"But things are bad down on the river and I don't think it's safe to allow them to go unprotected another day. You know if something should happen—" here Davies had a stroke of genius—"while we are here an inquiry would be sure to follow and we'd be blamed."

"Yes, yes." It was no use taking the chance, decided the major; besides he didn't have to ride out in the hot sun. "Very well, take your outposts out and post them. Remember, not a single shot is to be fired at a Mexican under any circumstances!" With a grunt the major tipped his chair back against the cool adobe wall of the store.

In ten minutes a long column of troopers in column of twos headed out of camp. Luckily the major was asleep or he would have remarked on the size of the outfit that Davies was taking to post two outposts of sixteen and twelve men respectively, for instead of the twenty-eight or thirty men this would have meant, there were nearer fifty men in the column.

And the men, who had ridden all day and already covered some twenty-five or thirty miles in the hot sun, were excited and happy, their fatigue forgotten in the prospect of a fight before the day was over.

"You'll have to stay behind and watch things here, Sergeant Bannion," he had told the first sergeant.

As good a soldier as Bannon was, he could not repress the disappointed look that shadowed his face at this ultimatum. But he took his medicine and morosely watched the column as it rode away.

Advance guard and flankers having been sent forward, Davies settled down to the grueling trot and walk which should eat up the miles between him and the Hayden ranch. He had little hope of arriving there before the bandits reached it; it was nearly twenty miles away, three hours' march. Luckily the day was advancing and the cool of the evening would soon lay its caressing hand on his men and horses. Looking back at his column, he saw the faces of his men, grim and dusty but staring steadfastly to the front. The men were only anxious to get somewhere within striking distance of the bandits.

By increasing his trotting time and decreasing his walking time, by cutting down the time of his hourly halts, Davies hoped at least to get there in time to punish the bandits. At the first halt the men stood around impatiently. When after the first five minutes he gave the signal to mount, the troopers piled into their saddles, obviously relieved to be on their way.

Back of him, down through the column, the only remarks made by the men were questions as to the time and profane expressions of hope that they would get there soon enough. These Tennessee and Virginia and North Carolina boys might not be trained cavalry soldiers yet, but had the first instinct of good cavalry soldiers, which was to get there and close with the enemy as soon as possible.

The first hour passed and the second. His eye on his wrist watch, Davies estimated that they had covered a good two-thirds of the distance and maybe a little more.

The contour lines on his map showed that the ranch-house nestled in the center of a small valley. It was high time to begin to watch for signs of it. Suddenly he remembered that his advance guard was well out in front. He did not want them to commit him to a fight on ground not of his own choosing. He signaled ahead to the connecting files, waving his hat around his head in a large circle, the signal for assembly.

Ahead of him he could see the signal being passed forward to the point of his advance party. Soon the connecting files began to drop back. After them followed the two sets of fours which made up the advance party. Behind them Davies could see the flanking patrols of two men out on either side, and last the two men on the point.

Halting the troop a moment, he dismounted his men and ordered them to load and lock their rifles. This was done briskly. The men grinned at one another and mounted with alacrity when the signal came.

Davies moved forward with two sets of fours, dropping out connecting files as he advanced at a gallop and the troop followed at a trot. When he had extended the distance between himself and the troop by nearly a thousand yards, he slowed down to the trot, looking to the rear to see whether his connecting files were properly spaced so as to flash back his signals without any delay. He nodded with satisfaction, then turned his attention to the ground before him. The terrain began to slope downward. Evidently he was at the head of a small valley. As yet he could see nothing. Advancing a little farther, he halted his horse, signaling "halt" back along the line.

Taking out his field glasses, he studied the floor of the valley opening out in front of him. Nothing stirred. Ahead and beyond him some five hundred yards the road bent to the right and disappeared behind an outcropping butte. Studying this, his grasp suddenly tightened on his field glasses. A sudden flash of sun on polished metal caught his eye. These Mexicans were wiser. They had sent a sentinel forward! He had scarcely come to this conclusion when his conjecture was verified.

OUT FROM behind the butte, struggling to mount his restive horse, there came into full view a sombreroed Mexican figure. The man at last mounted his evidently half crazed animal and, turning its head

to the rear, galloped out of sight. Quickly signaling "gallop", Davies leaped into the saddle and set forth in pursuit.

It was a little foolhardy, but he figured that the Mexican would not have fled so precipitately had he not been alone.

With his horse speeding over the intervening ground, Davies came up to the butte and passed around it, followed by his handful of men.

There, not five hundred yards away, the Mexican was plying quirt to his animal, galloping madly to where a grove of cottonwood trees and some adobe walls sheltered a long low ranch-house.

Around the ranch-house were tethered many saddled horses.

It could not have been more than eight hundred yards away. The line sentinel, fleeing toward his comrades, was rapidly closing the distance. Behind him Davies could hear the rattle of the hoofs of his connecting files. His troop would soon be up with him.

The fleeing sentinel had arrived at the ranch-house, firing his revolver as he came. Men, clad in white and wearing sombreros, came tumbling out from behind the adobe walls. They ran to their horses and began to mount.

Behind Davies was the roar and thunder of hoofs. He must shorten the distance between his troop and the enemy to five hundred yards, a beautiful range with the Springfield rifle—battle sight range. Around the corner of the butte behind him swung the leading files of the troop.

Signaling them to follow, he set spurs to his horse. As he moved out he motioned them to form fours. The leading sets of twos immediately slowed down to the trot and the set of twos in rear came up to form sets of fours. Again he gave gallop march and thundered down toward where the Mexicans were milling around in wild excitement.

Three or four of them were already mounted and galloping away. It was time to stop that.

Davies' whistle was swinging wildly as he galloped. He grasped it and blew a long shrill blast. The men threw up their heads.

Still at the gallop, he turned his horse sharp left, leading the troop at right angles to their line of march and in a second or two having them broadside on the Mexicans.

As the last set of fours swung around on its No. 1 he signaled "fight on foot—action right." The beauty of the move was then apparent, for the troop stopped as though shot in its tracks; men swarmed from the saddles and only had a step or two to get to the firing line. Had he halted them in column the men at the rear of the troop would have had to run the entire length of the troop, arriving windblown.

As each man hit the ground on his stomach, he started firing.

Davies had turned over his reins to his orderly. He watched the effect of the firing through his glasses.

"Steady!" he called. "Steady Down!"

The men in their excitement were firing high. Then as calm and cool as though on the target range he walked behind them.

"Take a good half sight and squeeze the trigger!" he cautioned his men.

The familiar instructions had the effect of calming the troop. Davies saw Mexicans dropping here and there. A horse went down and then another. The four or five men who had managed to mount first were galloping furiously down the valley.

Stopping behind four of his men, Davies tapped them on the shoulders and pointed at the men galloping away. They ceased fire for a few seconds and ran up their sights.

"Eight hundred yards!" he called.

Soon they began to shoot carefully and slowly. One of the men went down, then another. Two got away and disappeared in the cacti and shrubs at the side of the valley.

Meanwhile the group at the gate of the ranch-house were melting away under the terrific rifle fire of the troop.

From inside the gate a man ran out

with a great white sheet and waved it frantically.

Davies' whistle shrilled forth above the sound of firing. The men ceased firing in a diminuendo of cracking rifles that at last ceased regretfully all along the line.

FOR A moment Davies studied the situation. On the face of it the bandits had seemingly surrendered. But the amenities of polite warfare were practically unknown to bandits. He reasoned that given a chance they would break and run or, worse still, fire into his men. Therefore he ordered one platoon forward dismounted, with instructions to the platoon leader to fire on the bandits if they showed signs of fight. The platoon leader was to let them go if they simply tried to get away. Davies was not anxious to be hampered with prisoners.

The other platoon was mounted. Leading them forward, he trotted toward the ranch-house. As he had expected, once relieved from the galling fire which had pelted them so disastrously, the bandits began to mount their horses and gallop away. By the time he arrived with his platoon the last bandit able to get away had galloped off. Seeing that the firing squad invariably finished off the survivors after a Mexican battle, Davies could not blame them for trying to make themselves scarce as quickly as possible.

There were eleven bodies on the ground. A few loose horses galloped around wildly and then came up to the troop horses, seeking solace from their own kind. About seven surviving bandits had made their escape. Five horses were killed. Three were so badly wounded that Davies ordered them shot immediately.

The other platoon soon mounted up and joined him.

From out of the ranch-house came a white faced woman, her hands clenched convulsively.

"There are two more of them hiding in the garden," she cried, pointing behind an adobe wall.

"Take a couple of men and get them, Sergeant," ordered Davies.

The sergeant dismounted, called two men and stalked away. A certain sardonic expression upon the sergeant's face as he walked away made Davies call him back.

"I have particular reasons for wishing to have those men left alive, Sergeant," he said.

The sergeant looked disappointed but nodded and shortly returned with the two bandits. They were frightened looking specimens. They hung back fearfully and had to be prodded along by the sergeant.

"*Habla Ud. ingles?*" inquired Davies.

"*No, señor, no coronel, no intiendo,*" they apologized.

With a sigh Davies began to form his sentences in Spanish. The men listened curiously as the unfamiliar syllables fell on their ears.

"You will return to your chief—he is Gordino, is he not? Yes? Good. You will say to him this—that for every American that is harmed by him in this district ten Mexicans must die. Do you understand?"

"*Si, si.*" They nodded their heads eagerly, a new hope dawning that perhaps after all they would not be shot down.

"All right, get you those two Mexican horses and go!"

CHAPTER XII

A MILITARY PROBLEM

IT WAS growing late and his outfit had put in a hard day, so Davies decided to camp at the ranch-house for the night. He wished to work out a plan for the better guarding and patrolling of the territory in his charge.

It was a problem. Here near the ranch two trails branched off, one striking southwest to Ojos Calientes on the river, twelve or fifteen miles away, the other one headed southeast to Bosque Bonita, also on the river and about sixteen miles away. The country between the outposts was

practically impassable, consisting of a series of cañons and rocky cliffs. This did not allow of lateral communication between the two exposed posts on the river bank. For one outpost to reinforce the other it would be necessary for the men to march all the way back to the ranch and then head forth again to the other post, making the distance between the two outposts practically thirty miles.

But that was not the only evil. From either one of the outposts to the support and reserve at Sierra Roja was almost forty miles. In other words, the orders as laid down by the major, practically left each outpost exposed and alone between thirty and forty miles to its nearest reinforcements.

It required some deep study to arrange for an outpost system which should correct these obviously fatal disadvantages. Davies pondered over the problem while the men prepared their bivouac for the night and while guards were posted and all made secure. After issuing orders fixing the station of every man in case of a night attack, Davies took out his map and sat down to a serious study of the problem before him.

Knowing as he did that Gordino with a large force of bandits was only a short distance from Bosque Bonita on the far side of the river, he could not afford to make a mistake which would imperil the success of his mission, or risk his men. The problem had one element of simplicity. The Mexicans were almost forced to cross either at Bosque Bonita or Ojos Calientes as the only two good trails into the United States from Mexico for miles along the river started at those two places.

Scheme after scheme suggested itself to his mind. He tested them by trying to think as a Mexican bandit. Each time that he did this he found some obvious weakness in the plan, which nullified it. Finally he came to the conclusion that there was no perfect plan. He must select the one which had the least disadvantages.

Taking out his notebook, he drew a triangle, with the ranch forming the apex and the two outposts and the river forming the base. At each outpost he placed four dots, representing a non-commissioned officer and three men, what is known as a Cossack post—a formation in which one man is guard for two hours at a stretch while the other two men rest. These men would keep their horses saddled at all times. On the trails running back from Bosque Bonita and Ojos Calientes and converging at the ranch, he placed three sets of two dots each, representing both double sentry posts and replacement posts for a pony express system.

In other words, should the bandits move on Bosque Bonita or Ojos Calientes in force, the Cossack post would send a messenger at a gallop toward the ranch. The messenger could go at the utmost speed of his horse for four or five miles, to the next double sentry post where a fresh horse and rider would carry on to the next post. In the meantime the Cossack post at the threatened point would fall back, picking up the sets of two men on their way back to the ranch and growing stronger by each fresh increment of men.

The arrival of the messenger at the ranch would start another one toward the outpost which was free from attack and would call them in.

By this method there would be ten men between Bosque Bonita and the ranch and ten men between Ojos Calientes and the ranch. When the two outpost and messenger detachments fell back on the ranch their combined strength would make a force of some forty-four men at the ranch or support position. With forty-four men a whole bandit Army could be held off until reinforcements were sent from Sierra Roja, or the support could fall back, fighting a rear guard action toward the main body at Sierra Roja.

There was one very obvious weakness to this plan. It did not allow for sending forward any good sized detachment from the support position at the ranch to either one of the two outposts. Should the ranch detachment move forward to

Bosque Bonita the bandits might attack by way of Ojos Calientes and cut them off from their base and vice versa.

Given a strict insistence upon having the outposts fall back on the support, instead of having the support go forward, the scheme seemed workable. If only he could remain here at the ranch, his logical post of command, Davies mourned. But the major had been very strict about his returning to Sierra Roja. Well, he would get the sergeant in and go over the matter thoroughly.

With map and pencil he and the sergeant went over it, exhaustively working until almost midnight.

"You have twenty-four men at the ranch-house for support. You have twenty men on outpost. Those twenty on outpost are to be relieved every day and men and horses rested as they will will have to be on the job day and night while on duty."

"What time of the day will I relieve them and have the new details posted?" asked the sergeant.

"I'm glad you asked that question. At no time in the day or night will you relieve the entire outpost at once. Your reliefs will go forward in driblets so as to have as few men absent from the support camp all at one time as possible. And remember, first, last and all the time that your support is not to go forward to the outposts but that the outposts are to fall back on the support. Do you understand? All right, see that your men understand it before they go on post."

AT DAYLIGHT the next morning two detachments of ten men each, including a non-commissioned officer, went forward, one taking the trail to Bosque Bonita, the other the trail to Ojos Calientes. Leaving his own horse at the ranch to rest up for the return trip to Sierra Roja, Davies took a troop mount and rode to Bosque Bonita. Spaced along the road he found the detachments, of two men each, making themselves as comfortable as the nature of the country allowed, their horses saddled and ready for instant movement. At Bosque Bonita he found that the corporal had found a good position for himself and the two men not on duty, a place where their horses and themselves were more or less concealed. Some fifty yards away where he had a good outlook on front and flanks was the sentry on duty.

All seemed to be quiet. The men had seen no sign of the bandits. Something about the very silence of Gordino's forces vaguely disquieted Davies. Long and intently he stared across the river, wondering what lay behind those groves of cottonwoods and what was happening there.

But the only thing to do was to take all the precautions possible and trust to them.

He returned to the ranch about noon. All was quiet there, the men in support fixing up the place to make it habitable. The sergeant had prepared the adobe walls for defense, knocking out loopholes and arranging for cover for the horses in case of attack.

After a bite of lunch, Davies took a fresh troop horse and inspected Ojos Calientes, finding the men spaced along the road in the same manner and the outpost position well selected. Here he took advantage of the hot springs for which the place was named and climbed into the natural tub cut from the living rock, in which the scalding hot water boiled up. Coming out red as a beet and refreshed, he dressed and headed forth to the ranch again.

He could not throw aside that sense of vague worry which had taken possession of him. Try as he might he could not analyze the feeling. It may have been caused, he reasoned, by a warning from his subconscious mind that he had neglected some important measure of defense. He could not discover any flaw in his plans. They seemed as foolproof as it was humanly possible to make them.

When he returned again to the support position at the ranch dark had come on. He had ridden nearly fifty-five miles that

day. But with a fresh horse a horseman in good condition receives a new strength. It is the stumbling weariness of an overtired horse that is the hardest thing about a long ride.

THERE was only one link in the chain to be closed. That was the long distance from the ranch-house to Sierra Roja. This he left until the morrow, making his plans to send down men from the main camp to dot the road with messenger posts in the same manner he had provided for between the supports and outposts.

The night was velvety soft. The moon came, flooding the mesa with white fire, making it look ineffably calm and peaceful. Davies was neither calm nor peaceful. Like a hateful incubus, his mind began to torture him again. There was something wrong somewhere.

"Something wrong—something wrong—" the words kept beating in his mind to the accompaniment of his horse's trot. The scheme was foolproof, if only people would obey orders.

A sudden cold chill went through him. He had been responsible for the training of his green soldiers, recruits who learn as much by example as they do by precept and drill.

What sort of example had he set them as to obeying orders?

That was the weak link in his chain. That was the thing forgotten.

The mesa no longer looked peaceful under the light of the moon. It looked vengeful and brooding. It looked sullen and secretive. His heart heavy within him, an immense foreboding weighing him down. At last he saw the lights of the camp and town before him. A sentinel challenged him from out of the darkness. Good, Sergeant Bannion was taking no chances.

"Any news?" he asked the man.

"I think there is, sir. Sergeant Bannion's worried about somethin'. He's been inquirin' if you was in sight all day."

Sergeant Bannion was worried. It was not like him to be worried for nothing. His heart if anything a little heavier, Davies rode up to the entrance of the camp and dismounted, casting a single rapid glance backward down the road that led south to the ranch and on down to his lone outpost at Bosque Bonita.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ATTACK

IF DAVIES could have seen what was happening at Bosque Bonita at the moment he put foot to ground nearly forty miles away he would have found the reason for his feelings of vague disquiet.

There were three men and a noncommissioned officer left there; Huggins, the sleepy eyed; Johnson, the serious, chunky, little Kentuckian; Gordowsky, the slow voiced ex-butcher; and Corporal Saunders who had only worn his chevrons for some three or four days and could not help but feel that the three men under his charge took the matter of his superior position very lightly.

"We gotta run things in a military way down here," he had announced to the three before making his dispositions.

"Oh, can that stuff!" Huggins looked bored and dejected. "I wish you'd take them there chevrons off and throw them in the crick. You been a blame' nuisance ever since you was made."

"Well, I'm the guy that catches hell if things go wrong," Saunders said sulkily.

"That there is right," opined Johnson solemnly.

"The hell you do. If things goes wrong down in this here neck o' the woods we all get the stuffin' shot out of us, and that ain't no pipe dream," retorted Huggins, looking like nothing so much as one of those drooping eared, sad eyed Missouri hound dogs.

"That there is right," Johnson nodded, deeply serious.

The four of them glanced over at the fringe of cottonwood trees that screened the other bank. The leaves trembled in

a faint breeze that began to cool off the heat of the day.

As they stood there they made a splendid target for any lurking sniper who might be concealed across the narrow Rio Grande.

The idea struck all of them simultaneously. Moved by a common impulse, they led their horses back forty or fifty yards where there was more cover. Near them was a partially wrecked cabin, built of mingled adobe and saplings. Its door sagged by one hinge.

"Huggins, it'll be your turn to go on post first," announced Corporal Saunders firmly, thereby displaying some quality of leadership by getting the most recalcitrant member of his small force away where his influence would be minimized.

Huggins grunted but had no argument.

"And what about my horse?" he asked pessimistically.

Saunders looked around; his eyes fell on the deserted cabin.

"Right there in that place would be good for the skates," he stated. "If we got in any scrap the horses wouldn't be hurt by no bullets."

"And how about us?" At least Huggins found another grievance. "Where we gonna roost when the air is full o' bullets? Answer me that!" He looked triumphantly at Saunders.

"We'll go in where the horses is and shoot out from behind them adobe walls."

"And get hell kicked outa us by four pair of horses' hoofs! Not this baby, not on your life!" Huggins was definite.

Gordowsky rose on his elbow from where he had been resting.

"Allus chewin' the fat, Huggins; you're worser 'n woman. What the hell you wanta do? Walk back to Sierra Roja about forty miles carryin' your rifle, if your horse gets shot?"

"That's right!" Johnson was round eyed and overcome at the suggestion of such a thing. Recruits they might have been, but already these men had acquired a horror of walking worthy of cavalry soldiers of ten times their length of service.

The argument was unanswerable. Growling to himself, Huggins led his horse through the doorway of the one room shack and tethered him, loosening the saddle girth and slipping off the bridle and hanging it on the pommel.

The horse, relieved of the weight of his bit and bridoon, began to chew busily at a sapling which stuck out from the wall.

The other men brought in their horses and one slipped out a nose bag and hung it over his horse's head. The others followed suit so that the animals began to munch away contentedly.

Saunders, accompanied by Huggins, strode back toward the river bank, the latter growling in no uncertain terms about the generally unsatisfactory conditions that resulted from the boneheadness of green and callow corporals.

They were making for a clump of willows close to the high bank when there was the sudden, sharp crack of a rifle.

Huggins stopped, his mouth open with astonishment, for Corporal Saunders had turned a single surprised and horrified look upon him and then had tottered and fallen.

Huggins, his air of dejection suddenly vanished, looked at the opposite bank of the river in time to see a dark face peering through the leaves at him, over the steady barrel of a rifle. He threw himself on the ground, not a second too soon, as there was another sharp crack of the rifle and a bullet went *Wh-e-e-e! Ping!* somewhere near him.

HIS FACE was white with anger; he looked at Corporal Saunders flat in a heap, his right leg strangely twisted under him. Again he swore and threw over the safety catch of his rifle as he shoved it ahead of him along the ground and crawled forward where he could get a better view.

There he was! Not over fifty yards away the dark featured man was standing up and peering across the stream, firmly convinced that he had done for both soldiers.

"Here's where you get yours, you murderin' dog!"

Huggins took careful aim and squeezed the trigger. The gun jerked convulsively against his shoulder. The Mexican on the farther bank screamed, fell silently backward, his hands clutching the air.

The river bank on the far side exploded into sudden activity. A perfect fusillade of shots rent the air. Huggins glanced cautiously behind him. His heart gave a leap of thankfulness, for he saw back through the trees, Johnson in the saddle galloping toward the rear and help.

Nearer at hand something moved. The storm of bullets sang overhead; but close by, hugging the ground, the big ex-butcher, Gordowsky, pulled and hauled Corporal Saunders back toward the adobe shack.

He knew now what his cue was. Raising his head again, he opened up on the farther bank at every shadow he could see, letting them have four rounds at rapid fire and cramming a fresh clip in as he emptied the gun. While loading he saw that Gordowsky was now out of sight from the other bank. The big Pole had hauled Saunders up over his shoulder and was nearing the shack and shelter.

Firing another string of shots as rapidly as he could load and aim and press the trigger, Huggins shoved himself backward; then crouching low, he broke and ran for the shack, entering it just behind Gordowsky and his burden.

"Is he killed?" he asked Gordowsky.

"No, broke my leg," answered Saunders himself, his voice weak.

Depositing the injured man on the ground, the big Pole leaped for the entrance and lifted the heavy plank door up as barricade. All was silent outside. Evidently the Mexicans were carefully reconnoitering before attacking.

MEANWHILE, some two miles away, a lone soldier lay flat on his back, his campaign hat over his eyes, his horse, held by the halter shank, dozing above him. The lone soldier woke up, startled. His companion who was on guard shook him roughly.

"Listen, Bill, I think I hear shootin' down toward the river!"

Bill, his senses immediately alert, rose to his feet. On their ears fell the sound of a faint popping.

"They're fightin' sure as hell!" remarked Bill, and he quietly tied his loose halter shank in the ring on the saddle and tightened up his saddle girth.

"What'll we do?" asked his companion uncertainly.

The men stared at each other for a space.

"It's a fight, ain't it?" remarked Bill.

They both climbed into their saddles.

That was why Johnson, galloping up the road as fast as he could spur his horse, met the two riding toward Bosque Bonita.

"Corporal Saunders' been shot—'bout a million greasers is fightin' 'em down there!" he panted in great excitement.

Now, according to their orders, either Bill or his companion were to gallop swiftly back to the next couple of soldiers two miles farther and pass the word to them. But Bill and his companion looked at the innocent eyes and trustful face of Johnson. They stared at each other, their faces grim. The greasers had killed Corporal Saunders, had they?

"All right, old kid," Bill picked up his reins. "You hustle back and get the word to Peterson and Jim Rheinhard. They're back a ways." The two hurried away toward Bosque Bonita, saying nothing, but watching the road as it slipped under their horses' feet, a look in their eyes that boded no good to any Mexican.

Johnson, his horse lathered and breathing hard, came at last to the second two men, some two miles farther. When they heard the news they asked first of all where the two men below them on the road had gone.

"Oh," Johnson informed them innocently, "they went down to help the men at Bosque Bonita."

Going down to help the men at Bosque

Bonita was the first thought that had leaped into the heads of Peterson and Jim Rheinhard. They in turn sized up Johnson. However they had sense enough to change horses with him.

It was in this manner that men came dribbling into Bosque Bonita until the entire ten men had arrived. The Mexicans still remained across the river, firing an occasional shot or two to show that they were there. With the reinforcements the soldiers crept forward to a position close to the river bank and commenced to return the fire.

It was a tired but still excited and alarmed Johnson who finally pulled up at the ranch-house some time later. The sergeant in charge could get little information from him except that the Mexicans were attacking in huge force and that Saunders had been slain and probably Huggins as well.

"But where are the ten men that should have reported back here?"

"They went on to help out at Bosque Bonita."

The sergeant ordered his detachment into the saddle. While the men rushed to throw saddles and bridles on to the horses, the sergeant paced back and forth deep in thought. At the end of five minutes his mind was made up.

He sent a messenger towards Ojos Calientes and another to ride to Sierra Roja. Forming up his twenty-two men, he set forth at a sharp trot for Bosque Bonita, alternating the trot with a gallop occasionally. Meanwhile the messenger sent to Sierra Roja hurried on his way, covering mile after mile and wondering whether the long road before him would ever end.

CHAPTER XIV

SATURDAY NIGHT

THE MESSENGER was still five miles from Sierra Roja when Davies dismounted and found Sergeant Bannion at his side almost before he had touched foot to ground.

"Liftinent, you do be lookin' weary and spint." Bannion's voice was all concern. "Take a bit nip o' this and it'll set ye up f'r the news Oi have f'r ye."

The sergeant unscrewed a nickel cap from a flask and poured into it a good stiff drink of whisky. The stuff was fiery but potent. Davies had ridden some seventy miles that day, a good part of it under the glare of the Texas sun.

Seated in his own camp chair, he stretched his weary legs and drank a cup of coffee.

"All right, Sergeant, shoot. What's the bad news?"

"Oi don't understand it at all, at all."

He shook his head and handed over a telegram. Before reading it, Davies looked out over camp and town and mesa, the crude harsh outlines of which had been softened in the molten moonlight. With a sigh, he opened and read the paper.

As he finished it he sat upright in his chair, his weariness forgotten. It was from the young lieutenant, his host of the camp which lay about twenty-five miles away from Sierra Roja.

AM BEING ATTACKED NEED HELP

He frowned as he thought over the situation. It was none too rosy a fix to be in. Here he had some three-fifths of his troop scattered all over the Texas landscape. He stared down in the direction of the river, so white and silent in the moonlight. There, if all was well, was a perfectly organized security force, outposts and supports all knit together with communication agents so that the whole formed an impervious shield to hold back any attacking force which might risk trying to break through.

To respond to this message meant leaving that whole territory without a commander who knew the ground. Sergeant Bannion was dependable but he had not been over the territory to see it at first hand and envisage its problems. And it was a bad tactical error to leave outposts and supports hanging in the air by removing the main body from behind them.

"Where's the major?" asked Davies of a sudden.

"He left on the train for El Paso. He said to go to the hilp of that troop as soon iver as ye got here," Bannion informed.

The major had passed the buck as usual. The old Army game! If Davies got away with it it would redound to the glory of the major. If Davies fell down on this difficult job, the major would slide neatly and expeditiously out of the way and let him receive the full blame.

But after all, that was not the main thing. Here was this troop below him needing aid, or thinking that it needed aid, which was almost as important. In any case he was ordered to go to its help.

From far over the mesa came the long blast of a locomotive, the through train, which came through at this hour, and always stopped for water for five minutes.

Davies was suddenly erect on his feet.

"Turn out every man you have except two to guard camp. You remain here. We'll take the train."

Men came tumbling out of their tents, buckling on belts and dragging rifles and pistols. A squad of them were detailed to carry two boxes of ammunition, which Davies intended to distribute on the train.

At a run, the remaining platoon of the troop hurried pell-mell toward the station. To Bannion in a few brief phrases, Davies rapidly described the situation below and was off, scrambling on the train just as it started to move.

BACK in the camp Sergeant Bannion watched the train pull out of sight. He stared over the long row of deserted tents and the full picket line and sighed. It was some handful for three men, unaided, even to care for the horses.

Again he looked out over the silent mesa, down toward the river, wondering what brooded behind that curtain of moon flooded plain. So clear was the night that he could see the white ribbon of road, winding away into the distance. His eye rested on this for a time. Then he took a step forward and peered long and carefully. Something moved on the road, far away, a dot that was coming rapidly nearer every minute.

"Sure and it has all the air of a mon gallopin' this horse faster than the rigulations allows," he grunted, and sought his field glasses. "And domned if it ain't a sodger; there's no missin' that set o' the shoulders and the shape of them hooded stirrups!"

The two men left with him in camp came up and joined his vigil, sensing by the sergeant's excitement that something was astir.

The three watched anxiously as the man and horse, steadily growing larger, disappeared into hollows only to reappear again on higher ground, rapidly closing up the distance which lay between him and the camp.

Behind the three watchers the camp lay deserted and silent enough, but it was Saturday night in the town and the place was filled with ranchers who had ridden in to do their shopping, to have a drink or two and play a game of pool. There were more than usual this Saturday night, as the news of Tom Jerrold's death and the murder of his wife and child had set the whole countryside seething with anger.

Turning his gaze a moment from the advancing horseman, Bannion could see the ponies of the ranchers and cowpunchers tethered outside the store and the pool hall and the saloon, wherever a horse could be tied.

CHAPTER XV

BANNION'S ARMY

AT LAST the lone rider came into camp, his horse weary and stumbling.

He informed the worried and anxious Bannion that there was a big attack against Bosque Bonita, that several men, including Corporal Saunders and Private Huggins, had been killed and many more wounded and that the sergeant at the

ranch had marched to their assistance and asked for help.

"It's hilp he wants, is ut?" Bannion looked over the deserted camp. "A fat lotta hilp Oi can be afther sindin' him, me shtandin' here wid two minand Lord knows how minny horses—it's organizin' a new throop Oi'd have to do and where 'd Oi git the min?"

He stared down the town's one street where cowpunchers and ranchers were lounging around the bright lights of the porch of the general store.

"Organize a new throop? Why not?" he said to himself, and suddenly he called for his horse and throwing the saddle on it, galloped down to the town.

Before the startled men lounging on the front of the general store he drew up with a clatter, his hand raised to command attention.

"Is ut any o' ye that are frinds of Tom Jerrold?" he asked.

There was silence for a space, then came the responses.

"Sure. We're all his friends," voices called.

"Thin give ear to me and Oi'll promise ye some revinge. The sodgers has gone from this camp to hilp oot a friend below on the railroad. If ye're wishful to take a crack at the graysers, now's the chance, for by the same token they're fightin' whut min we have at Bosque Bonita."

A low growl rose from the assembled ranchers and cowpunchers.

Men rose to their feet eagerly.

"Oi'll take such of ye as want to fight. If Oi can git no wan to go wid me Oi'll go alone."

The men began to swarm from the porch and to untie their horses.

"But if ye go wid me, ye'll have to be sworn in and obey ar-r-rders loike good sodgers; it is no good goin' into a foight loike a bunch of tachers on a Sunday School picnic."

The arresting notes of the sergeant's voice brought every one to a standstill. Men nodded here and there.

"Sure we'll take any oath you want," they shouted.

"Thin ta-ake off your hats and hold up yoour right hands."

Rather embarrassed and a little self-conscious the men did as they were bid.

The sergeant's voice rang out:

"Do ye sware to uphold and difind the constitootion o' the United Sta-ates of Amerriky aginst all inimies, foreign 'n domes—domesticated, and to till the truth the whole truth and nothin' but the truth widout partiality fear or favor, so hilp ye God?"

They nodded and lowered their hands and placed their hats back on their heads. It sounded very impressive at that, the oath as administered by Sergeant Bannion, and none knew that it was a mixture of the oath of office and some assorted formulas for court martial swearing.

"How minny have rifles?" asked Bannion.

None had.

"Scather thin, and big, borry or stale ivry rifle in the place and return here on the run wid all the ammunition ye can carry."

The men hurried away, galloping up and down, shouting at every house. A group of them entered the store and bought the storekeeper's supply of rifles and ammunition. Finally they came back. Two of them had shotguns, but the rest of them had rifles of a sort, most of them of .30 caliber.

Bannion lined them up and had them count fours. He had eight sets of fours in all, thirty-two men.

"Oi misdoobt ye'll break me heart thryin' to make sodgers uv ye all in foive minutes. But Oi've fought in Cuba and the Philippines and in China. Ye may know ranchin', but Oi know foightin' and calvary. Now f'r the love o' hivin kape your distance betwane sets o' fours and don't let one couple o' horses be climbin' all over the fetlocks of the set in front. How ye will carry your rifles is a problem each man will figger out f'r hissilf. We will now move out in sets of twos, and ye will follow behint me, rigulatin' your pace on me."

They followed out in a formation re-

motely resembling a column of twos. Sergeant Bannion, in approved cavalry style, started them at a walk. Murmurers rose behind him.

"Ye will rimimber thot we may hov fifty 'r a hundred miles to go before we're through findin' this murderin' Gordino. I intind to kape the horses in shape!" he bellowed.

The murmuring died down.

It was when he started the regulation trot that the trouble came. For the Westerner lopes on his cowpony or, if he is fortunate enough to be able to gain possession of a single footer, he rides at that gait. But somehow the column kept going, although there was much seesawing between sets of twos. It went better when Sergeant Bannion extended the distances between each set of twos. As they rode along the moonlit mesa, he gave them some instruction in forming fours.

ONCE they had learned this simple formation he stopped and gave them a "fight on foot" formation. At the end of the first six or eight miles the ranchers had learned the rudiments of working in unison as a cavalry force. There were, of course, no link straps for the fight on foot formations, those short straps that so quickly and neatly snap a set of horses together, linking them head to head. But Bannion made up for this lack by making each No. 4 hold the reins of each of the other three horses.

Thanks to Sergeant Bannion's enterprise, he led toward the river and the fighting, a good sized group of mounted men who, if they were not trained and disciplined cavalry, at least possessed the main virtues of good irregular cavalry. They could ride and shoot. They possessed, true enough, one of the outstanding vices of irregular cavalry; they might or they might not obey orders.

The men took the experience as a joyful interlude in the monotony of their lives and were as happy as a group of schoolboys. For the first time Sergeant Bannion heard the mournful lilt of cowboy songs. "Bury Me Not On The Lone Prairie," was sung again and again.

As midnight passed and the chill of the dark hours before dawn began to penetrate, the cowpunchers grew more silent and the column rode through the blackness of the night like a somber cavalcade of ghosts without a sound except the occasional jingle of bit and spur to disturb the silence.

It was only about an hour before daylight when they rode up to the dark and silent ranch-house. There was no one about. Finally a sleepy soldier came up, clad in breeches and shirt only, and informed Bannion that he had been left behind, as his horse was lame, and that all the platoon was down fighting at Bosque Bonita.

How about the men at Ojos Calientes? They had ridden through and gone to Bosque Bonita. No, there was no news from Bosque Bonita.

Bannion's men had fallen out and were all over the place. It took him about ten minutes to get them assembled and back in column again, but he started forth at last, riding to where the trails divided, one going to Bosque Bonita and the other to Ojos Calientes.

It was here that they met the two Mexican peons with the small wagon hauled by a team of burros.

THE COWPUNCHERS and ranchers, most of whom spoke Spanish, came crowding around the wagon, sending a volley of questions at the two peons. who cowered in their wagon. They had reason to be frightened, for, as a rule, when the Texan goes on the warpath he shoots every Mexican he encounters, on the theory that a good Mexican is a dead Mexican.

But the information they received from the peons caused a hubbub of argument to start among the Texans. Sergeant Bannion, impatient, tried to get them into formation again to move on. They shook their heads and went on with the argument. Bannion gathered that the

peons had reported a large body of bandits coming up from the direction of Ojos Calientes. The cowpunchers were all for heading toward Ojos Calientes and fighting the bandits.

"All very foine—" Sergeant Bannion shook his head—"but we can not be foightin' the graysers pace-male loike this; we should git all the min together and put up a dacint foight. Besoides, the byes at Bosque Bonita may be havin' a rough toime of it."

Another hubbub of argument rose. Sergeant Bannion grew tired of it.

"Is ut a debating sassiety we are or a gang o' foightin' min?" His voice was heavy with sarcasm. "If ye are undther me ordhers ye will folly me; if ye are afther wantin' a private war of your own ye can all go to blazes. Oi'm off to Bosque Bonita."

He rode away into the darkness.

He rode alone. The cowpunchers wrangled a while, then set forth at a gallop for Ojos Calientes.

CHAPTER XVI

AT THE RANCH-HOUSE

NOT AN hour after Sergeant Bannion's departure from Sierra Roja with his column of ranchers and cowpunchers, a train pulled into the station and Davies swung onto the platform, followed by his platoon of thirty men, all disgusted and angry. The telegram calling them to the aid of the neighboring troop some twenty-five miles down the line had been a fake.

Upon arrival in the camp of the young lieutenant who had been his host in the march to Sierra Roja, Davies found the place peacefully asleep. A few minutes conversation with the lieutenant had convinced him that something was radically wrong.

Questioning of the man at the railroad station had elicited the information that the telegram calling Davies had been filed by a Mexican unknown to the telegrapher.

An intense worry took immediate possession of Davies. Evidently something was up and this means had been taken to get him out of Sierra Roja while it was happening. There would not be a train returning for another hour. The troop in camp turned out hot coffee for himself and his men and he snatched a few minutes' sleep while waiting for the train.

The trip up to Sierra Roja seemed to take an interminable time.

He hurried to the camp, followed by his men. Here he received the news of the attack on Bosque Bonita and the departure of Sergeant Bannion with the column of cowpunchers and ranchers.

There was no further news.

Only one thing could be done.

Ordering the horses saddled, he waited while the platoon prepared to set forth. Three extra rations for the horses and two for the men were packed in the saddle bags, extra ammunition was issued. After half an hour the platoon was mounted and equipped, ready to set forth.

He ordered the guidon carried. Knowing that whatever might be the condition of the men below they would be in need of rations and forage, he ordered the wagon out, loaded with supplies. He ordered the forward march and set forth into the darkness, headed for the river.

His reflections were none too happy as he moved steadily forward, his men riding silently behind him. Evidently the whole system of outposts and supports that he had devised so carefully had broken down at the first impact. Analyzing the matter, he came to the conclusion, a very excellent conclusion, for this, his first experience at having things go wrong, that it had all been his own fault.

He was to devise from this a rule that he afterward followed, that disobedience of orders is always the fault of the officer issuing the orders. Either he had not taught the necessity of obedience, or he had not made his orders clear enough. He also learned another very important lesson, that in warfare the simplest plans are the best, that an objective only to be attained as the result of the working out

of very complicated plans seldom is realized.

Sadder but wiser, also very tired from the many hours he had spent in the saddle, he rode on, gathering what comfort he could from the fact that he had thirty of his troop left at any rate and with thirty well armed, well equipped troopers wonders could be accomplished.

AFTER what seemed interminable hours of rising and falling to the trot, he arrived at last at the ranch-house which he reconnoitered carefully before approaching. There were many men about and he heard the loud groans of some one evidently badly wounded.

The place was filled with the ranchers and cowpunchers. From them he learned that Bannion had led them as far as the trail branching off to Ojos Calientes, that they had refused to follow Sergeant Bannion, that he had ridden on alone.

Here they grew a little shamefaced but went on with their stories. It seemed that they went forth to tackle the bandit force single handed, a bandit force supposed to be marching up from Ojos Calientes. Davies could read between the lines as they talked, and saw exactly what had happened.

Still treating the expedition as a picnic, they rode along at a gallop, laughing and singing, with no advance guard of any nature out and with no attention paid to what the darkness of the night about them might conceal.

And the bandits, inured by several years of guerrilla warfare to most of the hazards of irregular fighting, had come out of the darkness suddenly and routed them. They had left two dead men behind and, carrying three wounded, had fled to the ranch. From what they could tell from the sounds in the darkness the bandits had gone on, hurrying down the trail toward Bosque Bonita.

Yes, there were immense numbers of them, two or three hundred.

Allowing for the natural exaggerations of defeated men, Davies still realized that a considerable bandit force had ridden in between him and his men at Bosque Bonita. He fingered the hilt of his sword and nodded to himself. It was a case of cutting through the bandits.

"May we come along?" asked the ranchers, their faces grim as they listened to the groans of their wounded and thought of the two dead men left on the field.

"Yes, certainly," Davies answered, "but only as a unit that will obey orders."

"Anything you say," they answered.

"All right, elect one of your number as chief. He will be absolutely responsible for you and he will obey my orders."

This was quickly done. A tall gangling rancher named Reynolds was unanimously elected. He was pretty much of a man to Davies' way of thinking and the two shook hands gravely.

"You ride with me, Reynolds. Tell your outfit to keep together in column of twos ready to obey orders."

"You bet," agreed Reynolds. He marshaled his force of ranchers and cowpunchers in rear of the platoon of soldiers.

"What's your plan, Lieutenant?" asked Reynolds as they moved out.

"Simple enough, to catch up with those bandits, to go through them like—well, you know what happened to the tall Swede—" and the two men grinned—"and to rejoin the rest of my troop on the other side. With the whole force then we should raise Cain with the bandits."

"Fine," agreed Reynolds, and watched Davies with interest as the tall young officer called up two soldiers and sent them ahead at a gallop to find the rear of the bandit force.

AT A SHARP trot the whole column followed. The dawn was staining the eastern sky with a faint glow. The morning mists were rising slowly. With the advent of a new day, fresh strength and courage came to Davies and he slid his long straight sword from the scabbard and thrilled to the responsiveness of the slender chilled steel blade with its razor

edge and chisel point. Inserting its tip in the scabbard mouth he slid it down with a clang of steel on steel.

"We'll attack in echelon," he told Reynolds, who looked blank, until Davies explained the formation.

The sixty men would be divided into four columns of about fifteen men each. Davies would lead the first column which would attack with pistols, the second small column would follow at a gallop, in rear of the first and some ten yards to the left, the other two columns, these consisting of the cowpunchers, would follow still further to the left and rear. The advantage of the formation was that each column had a clear field of fire to front and flanks, each column protected the rear of the column ahead of it and the effect upon an enemy was as the repeated smash of four heavily driven blows.

Scarcely had they had time to make the dispositions when one of the scouts rode back to report that the rear of the bandit column was no more than five hundred yards ahead.

With Davies was his trumpeter.

"When you hear that trumpet blare, gallop forward to the charge; when it blows again, assemble on the trumpeter with your men," he told Reynolds and that individual went back to his detachment.

The five hundred yards was rapidly covered. Ahead of him Davies could see the road winding along in and out of the cactus. The backs of the rearmost bandits could be seen very plainly. They rode along, not bothering to look around. So much dust did their progress make that Davies could not see much beyond the rear six or eight men.

He slipped off the safety catch of his pistol. His men did likewise. They were almost up to the rearmost bandits now.

Suddenly Davies nodded to the trumpeter. That enthusiastic youngster blared forth the stirring notes of the "charge." A great shout went up from the soldiers and cowpunchers. Riding down on the bandit column, Davies let the first few men have the entire contents of his pistol. Behind him he could hear his men shouting and firing.

The bandits milled around uncertainly and finally turned their horses off the road to the left. As they did this the second column of soldiers hit them and scattered them like chaff, the remnants attempting to flee.

With wild, shrill cheers the cowpunchers came into action, their columns completing the breaking up of the Mexican force.

Davies galloped along, his sword out, lunging and thrusting at every bandit within reach. As nearly as he could figure, there must be about a hundred bandits in the party. They were milling around like sheep.

Suddenly they were in wild flight, streaming in all directions.

The soldiers looked regretfully after them but the cowpunchers followed like hawks after pigeons, and ran down and shot man after man.

Davies signaled to the trumpeter for "assembly." The platoon soldiers closed in and were waiting when the cowpunchers, flushed and breathing hard, came riding in one by one, talking loudly and happily.

"Good work," nodded Davies to Reynolds.

Not a man had been hurt, although one soldier had a revolver bullet through his hat. The surprise had been so sudden and complete that the bandits had no time to draw their weapons.

ANOTHER short march brought them to the outguards protecting Bosque Bonita. The men were unfeignedly glad to see the rest of the troop.

They shouted that all was well, that there had been several attacks by the bandits, all of which had been beaten off.

In Bosque Bonita Davies found that the sergeant in charge had thrown up some hasty entrenchments and had made a strong defensive position of the place. There were still some bandits on the far side of the river, but in small numbers,

the main group having withdrawn in the night.

Ordering the horses unsaddled and fed and the men to cook and eat, Davies looked over the place.

"Where's Sergeant Bannion?" he asked casually, imagining that he was resting.

"Why! Isn't he with you?" The sergeant looked surprised.

A sudden chill came over Davies. He turned to Reynolds.

"He left us early this mornin' headed for Bosque Bonita," Reynolds answered his unspoken question.

"We'll have to scatter out and hunt for him," Davies remarked without a second's hesitation.

Reynolds knitted his brows for a moment.

"Jes' a second, Lieutenant," he said.

He hurried away to where the cowpunchers were fraternizing with the soldiers and telling of the events of the night past. After speaking to several of his cronies Reynolds returned.

"Looka here, Lieutenant," he began, "it's kind of our fault that Sergeant Bannion got lost. The boys would like to have the job of huntin' for him."

"That's pretty decent, I should say; go to it," Davies agreed.

The cowpunchers were soon in the saddle again and filed out of camp toward the place they had last seen Sergeant Bannion.

"Oh, he'll turn up all right," comforted the sergeant.

"I'm not so sure of that. It's Gordino we've been fighting and Gordino hates him bitterly and has offered a big reward for his capture. If he falls into that devil's hands he'll have a short shift and an unpleasant end. "

There was nothing to do but wait. A slight possibility existed that Sergeant Bannion might have lost his way.

In the meantime the wagon rolled into camp, the four mules trumpeting joyously. The cooks rapidly prepared fires and had a hot meal under way. With a detachment of dismounted men, Davies went down the river a few hundred yards and circled back on the Mexican side, surprising some ten men hiding there and driving them out. Posting a guard on the opposite bank, he had the animals watered. With horses groomed and fed and watered and men content with their first good meal for some time, the day crept on.

About noon the cowpunchers returned, Reynolds at their head, looking somber.

Davies, realizing that they must have bad news, went up to him.

"We looked all over the place and couldn't find hide nor hair of him. But we took a couple of prisoners and before we let them go—" Here several of the cowpunchers smiled grimly, and Davies realized that those particular prisoners had done all the going they would ever do—"they told us that Sergeant Bannion had been captured by Gordino's men and the last they seen of him he was bein' led away towards the south to the—"

"To the Corral of Death?" asked Davies anxiously.

"To the Corral of Death," echoed Reynolds, "and that murderer of a Gordino will have no mercy on him."

"No," Davies replied dully, "Gordino will have no mercy on him." He stared across the river to where the plain ran up to the mountains of Mexico.

CHAPTER XVII

LITTLE MOTHER OF SORROWS

GORDINO, the cold eyed, sitting in the room of the adobe ranchhouse which dominated the valley, almost smiled, as near as he could come to a smile at any time except when he was engaged in his most pleasurable of occupations, killing.

Gordino could afford to smile. From where Gordino sat things had been going well, exceedingly well indeed. There was that little matter of the Orozco crowd. There were at least two hundred prisoners, each of whom he would shoot down with his own revolver. He licked his lips at the prospect. And best of all, word

had come to him of the capture of the gringo, Bannion. The mere thought of the man made him bare his teeth. Well, there were many ways of repaying a man who had heaped insult upon him, who had added injury to insult by beating him up before his own men. Almost unconsciously, Gordino slipped his revolver from its holster and twirled the cylinder absently.

It was a beautiful revolver, that weapon of his. Its handle was of mother of pearl of milky translucence; in shape it was long and slim and feminine looking, so that he had well named it "Little Mother of Sorrows". It had succeeded in its short career in making many a widow and many an orphan and in adding to the sorrows of many a mother. How many he had killed he could not remember. When they came in great crowds which he had to shoot down one by one he grew confused with blood lust.

There were some outstanding ones however. There was his enemy, Salvator, whom he had found wounded behind the carpenter shop in Torreon that time Villa had captured the place.

Of course Salvator had a broken leg, but that made no difference. Gordino remembered the man's groans as he had dragged him onto the train and propped him up in a corner of the car, the while he played cards with some of his companions. Salvator had watched him, fascinated, as the cards had been dealt and redealt.

"The next hand I lose I am going to stop the train and drag you off and shoot you, Salvator," he had told the white faced man.

The next hand he won, and the next, showing the cards to Salvator each time. Then had come the losing hand.

"Here it is, Salvator."

He had laughed and Salvator had shuddered as he gazed on the five cards. And true to his word, Gordino pulled the bell cord and stopped the train. Grasping the wounded man roughly by the collar, he had dragged him along the aisle until he had reached the platform of the car. How Salvator had groaned and screamed as his broken leg knocked about! The last touch, he had thrown the cripple to the ground where he toppled over, a groaning but still conscious mass of tortured flesh. Leaping lightly down from the car step Gordino had ended the comedy by placing his revolver at Salvator's head. Thereafter he had calmly resumed his place at the card table as the train went on.

And this was the man that Sergeant Bannion, bound and tied to his saddle, was being led to meet. Bannion had become an obsession with Gordino. The wish nearest his heart was to kill the Irish sergeant, making the operation a little slow so as to see how the gringo reacted. Well, he reflected, there should be some rare sport in seeing this tall, blue eyed gringo sergeant die. It would not do to have him killed too quickly.

MEANWHILE Sergeant Bannion, surrounded by ten or twelve bandits armed with rifles, revolvers and knives and watching him like hawks, slumped in the saddle, his head on his chest.

His filled canteen had been removed from the saddle. The fierce rays of the sun beat down on him, parching his throat and making him think of cool waters and bubbling springs and all manner of such things not to be found in the arid wastes of northern Mexico.

He had asked for water. The men guarding him had merely grinned. Gordino, their chief, had particularly specified that there should be no water given the prisoner.

Well, he had suffered thirst before, thought Bannion, and he made himself as comfortable as his pinions would allow and tried to think of something else.

There was no doubt in his mind that Gordino was behind his capture and would be waiting for him at the end of the journey. He tried not to speculate upon what might be waiting for him at the end of the journey.

They made slow progress. It must

have been about noontime when they entered a small village and rode up its one street to an adobe house set back from the roadway. Peons came out and took the horses. Bannion was aided to dismount and was seated near the door of the place with a guard set over him while the remainder of the bandits went inside. Wondering whether he was ever to get a drink of water, he looked up at the door and found a pair of very beautiful blue eyes regarding him. A girl stood there; she could not have been more than seventeen or eighteen. Her dark hair and blue eyes, the smooth faintly olive skin and the tender wistful air of her made Bannion forget his thirst.

"It's Oirish you should be, me colleen, wid them blue eyes on you and the hair loike a raven's wing, sure and it's the *cawn dhu deelish*, the darling black head ye are—ye know that name?"

Bannion stopped in surprise, for the girl had thrown up her head, startled when he used the old Gaelic term of endearment.

She came a step nearer.

"How came you by that name?" she asked, her voice very sweet, her English quaint to the ear. "My father calls me that," she went on quietly.

"And what might your father's name be?" asked Bannion.

"Miguel Orijon," she answered, almost lisping, the syllables softened so that the last name sounded like "O-ree-hawn".

"And he calls you *cawn dhu deelish* and his name is Miguel Orijon and ye have the purtiest pair of blue eyes and mayhap the only pair of blue eyes in Mexico outside me own—hm—hm—there is matther for thought here. And where might this father of yours be at, ye lovely crature?"

"He is with Gordino, up above," and she pointed up the valley.

"And no credit to him, at all, at all." Bannion shook his head. "But that is nayther here nor there. Could ye get me a dr-rink of wather, me darlin'. Oi'm fair perishin' wid thirst and these most onpleasant companions o' mine will not give me a drink for love nor money."

Her face all concern, the girl sped into the house and returned with an earthen bowl, dripping with water. The sentinel standing near shook his head and said something in Mexican.

The girl stood there a moment, then placing the bowl on the ground went up to the sentinel, her hands behind her and smiled into his eyes. What she said to him Bannion could not gather but it was certain that the sentinel forgot his harsh orders and looked the other way while she held the dripping bowl to Bannion's lips. Eagerly he drank down the cool liquid.

"Ye could fair hear it sizzle." He raised his head. "Niver was a drink more wilcome and niver was a drink given me by a more lovely hand."

His captors came out of the house, and the horses were brought up.

"If Oi get through all this throuble up above wid me frind Godino, Oi'll rayturn here and talk further wid ye, *Cawn dhu Deelish*," he called to her as he was aided into the saddle.

As they rode on their way, Bannion looked back. The girl stared after him, her hands twisting together over her heart, her lips half opened, her eyes wide. Bannion sighed to himself and turned away, looking up the valley ahead of him.

One of the guards who rode at his side pointed up toward the ranch-house and the corrals above and said something in Spanish, laughing the while.

"Ye don't hov to get your back teeth sun burned laughing," retorted Bannion. "Sure and Oi know it's the Corral of Death."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RESCUE RACE

BACK at Bosque Bonita things were moving rapidly. Davies had stared off to where the blue haze of the mountains of Chihuahua met the sky. Somewhere between the river and those peaks lay the Corral of Death. Even now the life of Sergeant Bannion might be snuffed out. It was a matter

for quick thinking and quick action.

In the first place he risked certain court martial for crossing into Mexico and it might even result in his being cashiered from the Army, his career ruined. But that occupied very little space in his thoughts. Courts martial could be met and faced and life still would continue. But Sergeant Bannion once killed by this murdering Gordino could never be brought back to life again.

"Reynolds," he asked swiftly, "do you know how to get to the Corral of Death?"

"Yes."

"All right, we're going."

Davies called his sergeant to give the orders.

The word ran like wildfire through the men. They leaped to their belongings, began to pack saddle bags and stow their equipment, without a word being said to them.

Making a quick but thorough inspection of the troop, Davies picked out two lame horses and directed the immediate placing of new shoes on several others. Rations for three days for man and beast were ordered and issued to the men who stowed them away on their saddles. The wagon was ordered back to the ranch with the men and horses who were ordered to stay behind.

Corporal Saunders, whose leg had been put into splints, was resting easily but bewailing his fate at not being able to go into Mexico.

"It's just my luck," he complained.

He was lifted carefully into a bed made for him on the wagon and instructions were given the wagoner to get him back to Sierra Roja by the first available transportation.

The cowpunchers and ranchers were jubilant. Theirs was all the fun and none of the responsibility, Davies reflected a little ruefully. At the same time they raised the strength of his outfit to nearly a hundred men, no small consideration when starting to rescue a prisoner from a bandit force estimated at three hundred.

Thirty extra rounds of pistol ammunition and three extra bandoleers of rifle ammunition were issued to each soldier.

The cowpunchers and ranchers were equipped with various types of rifles and revolvers and varying amounts of ammunition. Under Reynolds' direction ammunition was distributed as equably as possible and such men as could use Government ammunition in their weapons were supplied with it. Unconsciously taking a lesson from the soldiers, the Texans began to work more smoothly in unison, and went swiftly and silently to their tasks of getting ready. Lacking mess kits, canteens and blankets, they were going to have hard sledding if the expedition into Mexico was at all protracted. But Davies knew that they were self-reliant men, used to roughing it; he also knew that they would quickly supply themselves with Mexican *serapes* and water bottles and could share the mess kits of the soldiers.

THE FORCE made an imposing show, nearly a hundred men, lean, hard, fit and bronzed, sitting their horses confidently and only awaiting the word to move out.

Davies gave the word, swinging them "right, forward, fours right" out of the clearing and down to the river.

As his horse put his forefeet into the Rio Grande, Davies looked back. Behind him was the scarlet and white guidon and the trumpeter. Behind them, looking like a veritable river of men and horses as they slid and plunged down the bank, came the rest of the troop, the ranchers forming a fourth platoon under charge of Reynolds in the rear.

The river was shallow. Davies drew a deep breath as his horse scrambled up the opposite bank. He was in Mexico. The Rio Grande had become the Rubicon in truth. The die was cast. He set his face forward and moved out, hearing behind him the slipping and sliding of the troop as it scrambled from the river to the shore and formed once more in order.

Reynolds pointing the way, Davies quickly sent out his advance guard and flankers. The march had started.

The far side of the river was much like the American side. The only difference was that here they were on foreign territory. Davies looked about, feeling the strangeness of it as they rode through groves of cottonwood and came out into the mesquite and cactus and Spanish bayonet of the open plain.

The men were joyous but subdued. Instinctively they felt that this was going to be no picnic. It is no light matter to invade a neighboring country with armed forces, especially when that neighboring country is filled with armed bandits in large bodies.

There is little water in northern Mexico. For that reason the trails and such roads as there are have to regulate themselves pretty well to the water holes. The ranchers possessed a good knowledge of the country and made themselves invaluable in pointing out the best route of march.

Davies hoped to rescue Bannion, provided he were still alive, without losing a man. There was added reason for this, outside of the natural desire to have his men come through unscathed; for should he lose any one of his soldiers or even have a man wounded, inquiries would inevitably follow and the whole thing would have to come out.

The main worry was the next water hole. This was in a village, which was a very likely garrison point for Gordino's bandits or a large number of them. Concealment was impossible in this wide open country with its immense distances and its clear air. The troop had been jogging along at the regulation gait for an hour and a half when one of the keen eyed ranchers rode up and pointed out a faint cloud of dust on the distant horizon. So far away it was and so dim that it might have been a slight shadow.

Davies bent his field glasses upon it. The cloud of dust leaped into his vision with startling clarity showing beneath its haze a long line of horsemen moving along parallel to the march of the troop.

"Well, they know we're here at any rate," Davies said to Reynolds.

"It's a question who gets to the next watering place first." Reynolds studied them through Davies' glasses. "They're headed that way. If we make it first we can get in and drive them off. If they get ahead of us we'll have a tough fight as the village is mighty well surrounded with adobe walls and there's plenty of shelter."

Davies wasted no time in getting started again. He accelerated the rate of march, cutting down the halting time and increasing the trotting time. The dust cloud on the horizon came nearer so that the horsemen could be made out with the naked eye. They were well beyond effective rifle range, however, and Davies kept steadfastly on his way. In this way the march continued for some three hours, neither body gaining on the other.

From a slight rise Davies saw, far over the plain, the dimly outlined huddle of buildings and trees that marked the first water hole.

To the south he could see the trail followed by the enemy force on their flank. This road converged to the village as well. By following their respective roads the two forces would arrive at the place at the same time.

The troop made still another mile. The village loomed larger to the vision.

THE ENEMY force was closing in on the flank, still paralleling the march of the troop. The column of Americans grew silent, watching this race for the water place. Another mile and the village was in plain view. Davies halted a minute and studied it through his glasses.

It seemed to be deserted and empty under the sunlight. At the far end of it he saw four or five horsemen galloping away. He frowned at this but it could not be helped. Sending on two men to reconnoiter, he turned to the first platoon commander.

"Take your platoon, lead it away from the column, dismount it to fight on foot and fire into that enemy force over there. I will have the second platoon dismounted farther back. When you hear

them firing, mount up and rejoin the troop." The sergeant nodded.

Without halting the speed of the column he drew out the first platoon and had the men rapidly off their horses.

The troopers commenced firing at about eight hundred yards, slowly and carefully. The enemy column halted and replied. From far away the faint popping of their rifles could be heard. Once in a while a faint *tzing* overhead would show that the troop was under fire. But the bandits were notoriously bad shots at long range and there was no damage done.

After he had marched the troop a thousand yards farther on, the second platoon in like manner was dismounted. It fired a ranging volley or two both to determine the range and to signal the first platoon. As the volley rang out, the first platoon in the rear ceased its fire, mounted and came at a gallop to join the troop.

The bandit force, jubilant, followed in hot pursuit, not noticing the second platoon waiting for them. When the bandit force had advanced to good rifle range, the second platoon let them have it, emptying three saddles before the surprised Mexicans drew up and started to return the fire.

In the same manner the third platoon was brought into play while the second retired and this procedure kept up until the entire troop was assembled safely within the village.

Reynolds, the Texas rancher, was outspoken in his admiration of the maneuver.

"Damn' if I ever knew what good soldiers was anyways before. Now I begin to see. That shore was a pretty little trick play you worked on 'em," he said.

"It's an old military maneuver, known as the retirement by successive detachments or some such name. It's a rear guard method of covering the withdrawal of retreating forces. It worked all right though, didn't it?"

Davies gazed through his glasses at the bandit force, forced to wait outside the town on the prairie while the troop watered its horses, refilled the canteens and ate a hasty lunch.

"Must be about one hundred and fifty men in that there gang," figured Reynolds studying them through Davies' glasses. "They're tryin' to join Gordino."

"Our job is to keep them from joining. Is there any way they can get there before we do without passing us on the road?"

"None at all."

"Well, that's our job, to keep them behind us. That ought not to be so difficult. How far do you figure it is to the Corral of Death by now?"

"Not so far, only about fifteen miles from here. We ought to make it easy before dark if we don't get in any fights."

CHAPTER XIX

THE CORRAL OF DEATH

IN THE large room of the adobe ranch-house at the head of the valley Gordino waited, patting his revolver "The Little Mother of Sorrows" which hung at his belt. Back of him stood several of his officers. There came to him, soft footed and hushed voiced, two of his officers, opening wide the door and standing at either side with drawn revolvers.

Into the room, his arms pinioned behind him, strode Sergeant Bannion, his head up, his eyes bright, although he well knew that death lurked in the hand that rested lightly on Gordino's hip.

"Well, we meet again," Gordino greeted him lightly.

"Shure and it's no pleasure to me to have to be associatin' wid the loikes of you," retorted Bannion disdainfully.

Gordino's face darkened.

"Naturally," he replied, smoothly enough, "none of the guests at the Corral of Death are pleased at being here. As host I welcome you very gladly and will endeavor to amuse you while you are here. It is really too bad that you have so short a time to remain among us." Gordino's face was full of mock concern.

Bannion looked at him strangely, in his eyes a queer light.

"Is ut so?" he asked, his voice troubled. "And yet, answer me this, ye murdherin' grayser, why is ut, that as Oi stand here facin' ye and your murderous crew, Oi fale no fear o' death. And why is ut, that as Oi stand here lookin' at ye, Oi see the blight o' death upon your face? Answer me thot, Gordino."

There was silence as Bannion finished. A faint stir took place among the officers behind Gordino. One moved forward slightly and peered at Bannion. Gordino's face for a moment was filled with a spasm of superstitious fear.

"And," Bannion went on, "there is one among ye one who has the daughter called *Cawn dhu Deelish* who knows that sicond sight comes oft to the Oirish, especial whin it has to do wid the blight of death. Am I not right, Miguel Orijon, Michael O'Ryan that was?"

The officer who had stepped forward, peering in the dim light, nodded his head.

"Right ye are," the reply came, low voiced, "but kape a quiet tongue in your head. Ye are in bad luck this day, you bould swaggerin' mon from County Clare."

Gordino had recovered his composure during this interlude, an exchange of words, which it is doubtful he heard.

"We will go now. I have a few guests that require attention before the coming of your turn." He turned to one who stood at his side. "Is all prepared?" he asked.

"*Si, si*, my chief," responded the man. "Come."

Gordino led the way. Bannion's guard pushed him aside as the bandit chief left the room. Then they prodded him, motioning that he should follow.

Out of the house the small group wended its way, following the slim figure of Gordino, who walked like a cat, fingering the butt of his revolver, the slim pearl handled "Little Mother of Sorrows".

Through the patio the way led them outside and down the hill to a large corral.

THE RAGGED followers of Gordino lined the fences of this corral, their rifles on their knees. The wall of the corral, more than six feet in height, was solidly built of heavy planking. Inside came a confused clamor as of many men. Occasionally the sharp crack of a rifle would rend the air and a pleased laugh would go up from the men lining the fences.

Gordino halted and motioned the group behind him to look over the stockade. At this place the ground rose slightly and one could see inside without straining. Bannion, staring within, saw a large group of men, herded like cattle in the center of the corral. They milled about, looking frantically at the fences which surrounded their prison. Every once in a while one of them would get pushed out from the fear maddened crowd in the center, a rifle would bark and he would fall.

Tall, lean, sinewy men they were, Orozco's fighters, peons and small farmers who had been captured by Gordino's men. Bannion estimated that there must be two hundred of them.

"You see them now?" Gordino asked gently. "In an hour they will all be carrion. Fine men, are they not? Strong men, good fighters, like you. You will see what happens to them, men who have had the temerity to fight against Gordino." Again he patted the butt of his revolver.

Sitting his horse statuesquely, not thirty yards away, was a tall Mexican, his *serape* thrown loosely over his shoulders. Gordino conferred with him a few minutes. The tall Mexican looked at Bannion incuriously, then nodded and rode back to where his men, some twenty horsemen, waited near the wall of the corral.

Beckoning to Bannion and the two men guarding him with drawn revolvers, Gordino leaped over the stockade. Bannion followed, somewhat awkwardly and with assistance from his guards. His hands were pinioned behind him.

Gordino, walking thoughtfully, his head bent, paid no attention to the group

of prisoners milling about in the center of the corral. They for their part were too busy seeking to escape the random bullets which dropped among them.

At the end of the big corral was a passage way or shute which led into a smaller corral. Through this Bannion followed.

This small corral was not of wood, but of adobe. The walls of it nine feet high. The two walls ran together, forming a triangle of which the entrance was the base. Bannion, observing these walls, saw that they were chipped and pitted with bullet holes. There were stains on the ground and splashes of brown against the walls.

"This, my friend, is the Corral of Death—" Gordino smiled—"a neat little workshop for a careful workman."

Squatted on the ground where the two adobe walls ran together was a soldier working at some objects which he had spread out before him on a *serape*. This man was facing the entrance to the small corral, not more than twenty feet away.

"Is all prepared?" asked Gordino.

"All is ready, my chief," answered the soldier, and Bannion saw that he was arranging revolver cartridges in little piles. Beside him lay two loaded revolvers.

"Are the revolvers well oiled?" asked Gordino.

"All oiled and ready, my chief," answered the soldier submissively.

"How many cartridges have you?"

"More than enough, my chief," answered the man.

"*Bueno*," grunted Gordino, and took up his station by the side of the man, his revolver in his hand.

He said something to the two men who guarded Bannion.

They immediately pushed and shoved the sergeant to one side of Gordino.

"You will now see how things are done at the Corral of Death, my friend. When we have finished with the cattle in there, we shall see how you like the medicine."

BANNION heard a shouting and trampling in the larger corral. Occasionally he could see the sombrero of a mounted man over the wall.

The soldier knelt in front of Gordino, with two loaded revolvers ready to hand to him.

The tall Mexican with the *serape*, to whom Gordino had spoken, rode through the entrance to the little corral.

"I have the first ten ready," he reported. "Shall I send them in?"

"Yes, but be sure to tell them what it's about. The moment they get through this gate I start to fire. Anybody who gets over the outside wall I will let go. Anybody who hangs back is to be shot by your men."

The wind was blowing. It was getting toward sunset. An old well stood in the corner of the corral. Above it hung a bucket and chain. The wind clanked this chain.

Outside in the large corral Bannion heard the voice of the tall Mexican. There was a lull after his words. Then came a chorus of despairing yells and screams that rose and fell to the monotonous sighing of the wind. Above it rose shouts and high pitched yells as of cowpunchers rounding up the herds. Evidently panic had smitten the luckless prisoners, for again and again the sharp crack of a rifle broke on Bannion's ear.

Through the opening into the larger corral Bannion could see the horsemen herding a group of ten men toward the Corral of Death. With the muzzles of their rifles pressed against the backs of the doomed men, the horsemen steadily drove them to the opening.

As soon as he caught sight of the white and frantic faces of the first ten prisoners Gordino spoke to them mockingly—

"Come on, my children, I'm just going to practise a little with my revolver but you know how poor a shot I am."

The men were pushed into the opening of the small corral and appeared at the entrance, hopping about like goats in an effort to dodge the hail of well directed

bullets that Gordino directed at them.

The ten made a wild rush for the high adobe wall, hoping to get over it to the promised safety. Steadily and calmly Gordino picked them off. One great fellow almost made it, only to be dropped back like a sack of flour.

As quickly as one revolver was emptied Gordino passed it across to his left hand and seized the reloaded one handed to him by the orderly. The soldier worked feverishly, reloading without ever looking up to see the effect of the bullets he was cramming into the cylinders of the revolvers.

Bannion felt his whole body shake. The first ten lay dead or groaning when the second ten were pushed into the enclosure. The second group went the way of the first and a third and fourth and fifth group followed rapidly, Gordino continuing to fire calmly and methodically.

Using all three of the revolvers, his own two and one of the orderly's, Gordino did not pause for anything. His movements seemed to be in perfect rhythm; he did not make a single useless motion. Now he fired at men who had thrown themselves prone on the ground, the next shot might be at a man climbing the wall, the third at a hopping, skipping, dodging creature, the fourth at a man who ran at him in some despairing hope of attacking him before the bullet brought him low. Gordino never missed.

Some poor devils, paralyzed with fear, fell on their knees the moment they came in the corral. These Gordino left until the last and wasted two or three shots at them, sending a bullet into arms or leg or shoulder in sheer deviltry before finally dispatching them with a merciful shot.

A great heap of bodies began to pile up below the adobe wall. Some of them quivered. Most of them lay still. Up this ramp of living and dead flesh clambered the panic stricken new arrivals only to add their bodies in turn to its constantly growing pile. Many of them actually got their hands on the wall only to fall back and die quivering at its base.

The shrieks and clamor of the prisoners on the outside awaiting their turn grew so loud that it almost overbore the occasional crack of the rifles of the guards who herded them and the steady banging of Gordino's pistols.

An occasional high pitched agonized scream would come from the bloody pile of bodies at the base of the wall. Gordino would look toward it and, when he would detect the writhing of some poor devil in agony, he would quietly put a bullet in it.

Bannion was shocked and nearly sick at his stomach with the stench of blood and the strain of watching the frightful scene before him. Gordino's face had never changed expression once during the whole slaughter. He might have been a hardened butcher slaughtering sheep for all the emotion it caused him.

Once during a slight lull when the next group of prisoners proved a little recalcitrant, he ceased firing and gently massaged the trigger finger of his right hand.

"Are you keeping count?" he asked Bannion. "That makes one hundred and sixty. When the score has reached two hundred you can pick out a nice soft place on the pile there—for you will be the two hundred and first.

It required no swift figuring for Bannion to come to the conclusion that he had about ten minutes more to live.

"Tin minutes is a powerful short toime," Bannion said to himself. "Shure and if Liftinent Davies knew Oi was in this pickle he'd come hell bent for leather. Well, the lad would have been here if he could," he said to himself.

CHAPTER XX

INACTION IS DANGEROUS

DAVIES had given no more time than was absolutely necessary to the watering of the horses and the replenishment of the canteens in the village of the first watering place.

The troop was anxious to be on its way.

They had sensed the necessity for speed if Bannion was to be saved and they wasted no time on their own affairs. One short shrill blast on Davies' whistle and the soldiers were surging into line and mounted before he had time to place the whistle back in his pocket.

The new advance guard, sent out to relieve the old, was acting as outpost. This advance guard simply mounted and moved out ahead when they saw the column moving forward.

The force of bandits which had been following them hovered cautiously on the outskirts of the village, suspecting a trap, long after the Americans had left. It was only when they had sent forward a few scouts and thoroughly explored the place that they dared follow. As it was they were well behind the American force, lost in the distance for the remainder of the afternoon.

It was well along toward late afternoon that the troop arrived at last at the little village at the foot of the valley.

Davies made inquiries. There was the blue eyed, dark haired girl there who stared at the Americans. Davies felt the eyes of the girl upon him until at last he came to the conclusion that she had some information to divulge. He asked whether an American soldier had passed along that way.

"Oh, señor, if you will only hurry!" Her voice was tragic. "Perhaps they are even killing him now—hear!"

She pointed up the valley. Davies could make out the faint *rat-tat* of shots borne faintly on the breeze.

"He must be putting up a fight at that!" he said half to himself, marveling at the volume of the noise.

"No, they are executing Orozco prisoners. When they have finished his turn will come."

Davies had scarcely waited for the end of her sentence. He turned to his horse and prepared to mount.

"Wait! If you go straight up the valley you will have to fight. There are many men between here and the Corral of Death," she called.

He paused, one foot in the stirrup.

"What other way is there?" he asked.

"There is a trail leads up the side of the hill and around in rear of the ranch-house. It is that trail you must take. It is not guarded. If you will do that I will send a messenger to my father to take the sentinels away from the rear of the ranch-house."

"Fine," remarked Davies, and mounted into the saddle. His advance guard was racing toward him. He shouted aloud to his men—

"Fight on foot—action front!"

He leaped from his horse, firing his pistol rapidly at the line of advancing bandits who came down upon them suddenly from the valley, firing as they came on foot.

A few of his men were beside him almost instantly. One rifle after another added its voice to the firing line. Men were racing up and throwing themselves down across the road at the exit of the village and a hail of bullets began to descend upon the bandit firing line.

The bandits turned to the rear and sought cover. Bullets were thudding into the adobe walls of the village and whining overhead.

The led horses were galloped back under cover of some houses. The firing line was now quite thick and powerful. The cow-punchers and ranchers were adding the bark of their rifles to its staccato rattle and smash.

Davies' rear guard was guarding the entrance to the village. A soldier came running up to him, bending low, and shouted that the force of bandits with which they had had the brush that morning were coming up the road from the rear.

The firing line was taking care of itself. Davies withdrew to make plans to meet this new eventuality. It was not a healthy situation. Here he was miles in foreign territory, with a large force of bandits barring his exit and another force barring his advance. The force between him and the ranch-house he estimated to be about one hundred men, but he could

see reinforcements of mounted men arriving constantly.

There is nothing more dangerous in war than inaction. Passive resistance ends at best in a stalemate and generally in defeat.

DAVIES stood, thinking hard. Reynolds came up to him and asked to borrow his glasses for a moment. As they stood there in the shelter of the doorway of the adobe house, the blue eyed, dark haired girl came forth again.

She was wringing her hands.

"Why don't you send a few men out that way—" She pointed toward the hill at the side of the village—"and let them get up to save the soldier up there."

"Is there any way men can get through without being seen?"

"There's a lane goes down through a little dry arroyo, between those two houses down there."

In a second Davies' indecision vanished. The way was clear before him.

He turned to Reynolds.

"I'll lead the bulk of the troop out that way and up and in rear of the ranchhouse. One platoon will stay here and hold off the bandits until we can hit them in rear."

"Let my men stay here," asked Reynolds.

"Dangerous place." Davies shook his head.

"That's why I asked," returned Reynolds quietly. "Besides, my men will do better here; they are not trained to move around and obey orders. Give them a place they can shoot from and nothing but a few tons of dynamite will pry them loose."

"All right," agreed Davies. "Have your men fire fast as they can. I'll leave you another platoon at that—'fraid to leave you too weak." He called to the sergeants of the first and second platoons, telling them to withdraw their men quietly from the firing line by driblets so that the bandits would not suspect the weakening of the force.

It was done very cautiously and carefully. The two platoons, some forty-five or fifty men all told, crept silently and as inconspicuously as possible to their horses. Leading them out, they hurried one by one into the shelter of the lane. The men on the two firing lines kept up a hot fire, for they were now protecting the entrance to the village as well as its exit.

His men assembled, Davies led them dismounted, every man leading his horse by the reins, down the dry arroyo. Scrambling and slipping over the loose sands and stones, they finally found themselves climbing above the village and working behind the first hill which screened them from view from the valley.

The men were sweating as they climbed the steep grade. Behind the shelter of the low hill which bordered the valley Davies mounted his men and led them on.

Upon the face of every soldier was a grave and worried look. The word about Sergeant Bannion's nearness to death had been broadcast through the troop. Judging by the compressed lips and serious faces it would go hard with the bandits if Bannion were killed by the time they arrived.

Slipping and sliding, the horses breathing hard with the steep pull in the high air, the column wound its way slowly up the far side of the hill.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LAURELS OF VICTORY

IN THE Corral of Death the lull which had come in the slaughter of the prisoners persisted for some time. Gordino grew impatient at last and called out. One of his officers came and whispered something to him.

"*Sí, sí,*" said Gordino, "hurry! I will be with you in a few minutes." He looked at Sergeant Bannion. "As soon as I finish this job—"

Again they waited for the next batch of prisoners to appear.

In the lull Bannion could hear an

immense bustle and hurry, the noise of horses galloping and the shouts of commands. Gordino grew angry and stalked out to the larger corral. His voice rose in a shouting tirade. The screams and entreaties of the prisoners rose again.

Gordino returned, his nostrils white with anger. His orderly handed him a loaded revolver. Again he took position, waiting. The screams and cries of the doomed prisoners of this batch came nearer and nearer. Soon the white faced and wild eyed men were pushed into the corral. Gordino's revolver began its steady barking. The frightened men howled and leaped, attempting to dodge. The relentless revolver shot them down as they kneeled to pray, shot them down as they dodged and ran, shot them down as they clung to the upper edge of the wall, until there were none left of that ten but quivering bodies.

"Hurry! hurry!" screamed Gordino, his eyes mad with the rage of slaughter, his revolver barking again as some wounded prisoner threshed around in agony.

The next batch was herded in in like manner. The crack of rifle fire in the outer corral had died down. There were so few prisoners left alive that the noise made by them was scarcely noticeable. Gordino's revolver began its relentless *crack-crack* again.

Suddenly Bannion lifted his head and listened. Above the noise of Gordino's shooting, above the screams of the few prisoners left, above the sound of the wind he heard another sound. It was a sound he had heard in the Philippines, in Cuba, in China. His heart gave a great leap. For there fell on his ear, unmistakable in its peremptory barking note, the crack of Army rifles. The sound started slowly and gathered volume as another and another rifle swelled the chorus.

So strong had been the surge of new hope and courage made by the familiar sound that he did not notice that Gordino, waiting for the next batch of prisoners, was eying him sardonically.

"Yes," he said, "your friends are arriving. But they are checkmated some distance away with several hundred of my men. By the time they get here you will be over there—" he pointed to the pile of bodies—"not knowing what it is all about."

He turned away to recommence his firing on the next batch of screaming maniacs who were turned loose in the corral. One more batch of ten and then his turn, Bannion reflected.

The noise of the firing redoubled. All was quiet in the outer corral. The last batch was driven in and dispatched. The place looked like a terrible slaughter house. Men had died as near as five and six feet away from where Bannion stood. Their bodies were scattered in all sorts of queer postures over the ground of this corral. Bloodstains were everywhere, pools of blood, sinking into the dry soil. The most gruesome sight of all was the great pile of bodies under the adobe wall. It reached halfway up the wall.

Bannion studied this wall reflectively. One could hurdle those dead bodies and make a getaway. But he had seen fifty or sixty men try it that day and fall, bullet ridden by the deadly aim of Gordino.

The steady crackling of the rifles from down the valley had lessened somewhat in volume. With the diminution of this sound Bannion's heart sank within him. Gordino was watching him coolly.

This time the bandit leader did not trust his orderly to load his revolver.

Picking up a handful of cartridges, he walked over and looked into Bannion's eyes as he calmly held them up to the sergeant's gaze.

"You see those five bullets?" he asked. "Those are all for you. I'll try not to kill you at the first shot."

Bannion had seen how Gordino had played with the kneeling prisoners, putting bullets into them at will in any part of their bodies, playing with them as a cat plays with the mouse.

"We will have a little sport first. Where will you have the first bullet—in the leg? No, that is not so good, you would not be

able to run then and there would be no sport. No, I will give you the same chance as I gave the others. The men will unbind your arms, you can come in here and make a try to get over the wall. If you don't, well, that will not be too bad."

He shrugged his shoulders and turned to the two men who guarded Bannion with drawn revolvers.

To them he spoke sharply. They nodded.

They led Bannion toward the entrance of the Corral of Death.

DAVIES and his troop were almost halfway to the ranch-house. Here, so blown were the horses, he had to order a rest to relieve pounding hearts and heaving lungs. He had to make his men remain mounted; breathless men can not shoot with any degree of accuracy.

When the horses seemed to have recovered, he led them forward. Far behind him he could hear the rifle fire of the men left to hold the village. The fire seemed pitifully weak. He wondered whether they had been rushed and overwhelmed.

He looked up sharply and drew his pistol. Coming down the hillside toward them, was a Mexican, slipping and sliding on the stones. The man held up his hands.

"F'r the luv av hivin, hurry will ye, ye soldier men; it's loike ye'll niver see your frind aloive again if ye do not."

Davies had no time to stop and wonder over a perfect Irish brogue come from a man in sombrero and white cotton Mexican uniform. He pushed his horse along, signaling to the others to hurry.

BANNION was led into the entrance of the Corral of Death and out on the far side in the large corral. Here his arms were unbound from behind him and he moved them to get the stiffness out of his muscles. The two men guards shoved him menacingly with their revolvers, attempting to push him toward that yawning gateway on the far side of which waited Gordino and death.

"No, no, me lads—" Bannion shook his head—"ye will not hurry me. Well I know that ould Gordino wants the right and privilege of shootin' me himself. Ye will not dare to put a bullet into me."

And it was so. The two men knew well what their punishment would be did they harm this prisoner so especially reserved for killing by their chief. Bannion stretched his arms and scuffed his feet against the smooth rocks with which the ground was littered.

An angry shout came from within the corral. Gordino was getting impatient. The two men grew more menacing. One of them cocked his pistol.

"Yes, Oi'll be movin'," nodded Bannion, "but Oi do not need ye to be proddin' me in tha tail. Ye will kindly remain here."

The two men started to follow him. Bannion stopped in his tracks angrily. They soon saw that nothing was to be gained by these tactics. Gordino's voice shouted again.

Bannion went forward, marching gravely and circumspectly, much as a man might march past his commander in chief, a little of pride in his bearing, a little of soldierly swagger about him, as of a man who knew his worth.

Nearer and nearer he came to the entrance of the Corral of Death. Now he could see Gordino standing there on the far side, his revolver ready and waiting. He had observed that the bandit chief never fired at a man until he reached the inside of the corral. Therefore he was safe for at least ten paces more.

One, he counted, two, three and four; they went rapidly enough. His head was held high, too high, for of a sudden he stumbled and fell on all fours, rising quickly with that foolish look on his face that a man has when he stumbles and falls at a moment of pride.

Gordino watched him coming and smiled at his stumbling. Nearer and nearer marched the tall gringo. He was brave enough, at that. He kept his eyes steadily upon Gordino's eyes; he walked with clenched hands, held well to his side.

Now there were only two paces left.

Gordino did not even bother to raise his revolver. He would prolong the uncertainty as long as possible. He would let Bannion come up almost to him before he fired that first and crippling shot. But Bannion had stopped, his feet braced wide apart. He was doing something odd with his right hand.

What was it? The arm swung in a circle and came up. Suddenly it straightened out. Something white and small came hurtling through the air. Before Gordino could move, before he could raise his revolver, he felt a stunning impact upon his hand and the revolver, yes, the "Little Mother of Sorrows" herself in all the resplendent glory of shining nickel and iridescent mother of pearl, went whirling away. In a second of agony he stood there his arm nearly paralyzed. It was Gordino's misfortune that he had never seen a game of baseball.

THERE was a shout and a roar and Bannion was upon him.

Seizing the startled bandit around the waist, Bannion lifted him off the ground in a powerful grasp and brought him down upon the soldier who stood next, the soldier, his mouth open, not knowing what had happened. In a frenzy of berserk rage, Bannion lifted the form of Gordino and flung it upon the heap of dead bodies lining the wall. Half stunned and helpless, the breath driven out of his body, Gordino felt something snap within him and a shooting pain dart across his chest. His right arm hung limp.

Bannion ran and picked up the mother of pearl handled "Little Mother of Sorrows" and brought it back, placing it at Gordino's head. He held it there a minute.

"No," he growled, "Oi can not kill an unarmed mon; bad luck to me." He turned as he heard some one behind him.

Without a pause his revolver barked twice. The foremost of the two guards, who had returned to solve the enigma of this silence fell in a heap. The second ran screaming from the corral.

There was a shout from somewhere. Near at hand Bannion heard the crack of a pistol.

"Thot's a .45 automatic or Oi eat me hat," he exulted, and turned to Gordino. The bandit was groaning and white faced.

"Oi told ye that the blight of death was upon ye," stated Bannion. The noise of running feet and shouting came to Bannion's ears.

It seemed but a second that Davies was before him and streaming behind Davies, the troop, stopping to pause aghast at the gruesome scene within the Corral of Death.

Suddenly Davies found himself patted on the back by Sergeant Bannion. Both men had tears in their eyes.

"Bannion, I thought I'd be too late," gulped the young officer, and turned away shamefaced at the emotion he had shown.

"And here's the dhirty dog that has done all this!" Bannion pointed to where Gordino lay, white faced and groaning. "Phwat will we be doin' to him, Liftinent?"

It was the morose Huggins who spoke, Huggins who had seen Corporal Saunders fall wounded at Bosque Bonita.

"Do with him!" he said and his voice quavered with unholy rage. "I'll tell you what I'll do with that dog!"

Before any one could stop him he had fired a revolver bullet into the prone bandit. Gordino screamed and groaned, throwing up his hands in a panic of terror. Again and again Huggins fired into him until the body quivered no more, and Huggins' gun was empty.

"A month's kitchen police for shooting an unarmed enemy."

Every one laughed. In that grisly charnel house they had to laugh or grow mad, with such horror all about them. Davies himself tried hard to keep the hysteria from rising within him and finally succeeded.

"To horse," he shouted, "or the men down below will be lost!"

There was a wild scramble for horses,

Sergeant Bannion finding his own near the corral, its saddle still on as is the pleasant Mexican custom. The troop tore out of the ranch-house enclosure like a torrent. Sabers were bared, as they poured down the road toward the bandit force that still kept up a desultory fire on the town.

The bandits, hearing this wild roar of advancing horses descending upon them from the rear, looked upward in fright to find hate maddened men on great horses, slashing and cutting down at them with great long sabers that looked blood red in the light of the setting sun.

It was too much for bandit nerves. They broke and fled in all directions. There was a great reunion in the town. The cowpunchers mounted and joined the column which hurried out after the force which had beleaguered them in the rear. This force melted away like snow under a hot sun.

They returned to the town and took stock of casualties. There were six slightly wounded men and two dead horses. The wounded men were cared for. Mexican horses were confiscated to mount the two men who had been unfortunate in losing their own animals.

That night they camped in the little town. Sergeant Bannion disappeared early in the evening. Before Davies rolled himself up in his blankets for a night's rest, he saw Bannion walking slowly back to the small adobe house with his arm around some feminine person.

Davies did not know who the girl was for certain, but he had a very good idea. And sure enough, joining the column next morning came the blue eyed girl and her father, both mounted and ready to move out.

"This mon, Liftinent, has been a rinigade long enough. He's tired to dith of bayin' called Miguel. He's comin' back to God's country and git civilized agin."

"I see," remarked Davies soberly. He suddenly grinned. "Out of the frying pan into the fire, Sergeant. You've gone and gotten yourself captured again—but this time I can't rescue you."

Bannion, the old reprobate, had the grace to blush.

THE MARCH back was unmarked by any trouble. The bandits had seemingly fled the country. At Bosque Bonita the ranchers went on, breaking up to go to their homes. The troop gave them three rousing cheers and there was much hand shaking and many joyful promises of reunions.

At Sierra Roja Davies found Major Cranston installed comfortably on the porch of the general store. The word of their exploits in Mexico had long preceded Davies' arrival.

"Well, here's where I get the bad news," he said to himself as he came up to the pursy little officer.

But Cranston was all smiles and cordiality. He went so far as to pat Davies on the shoulder in approving fashion.

The secret came out when Cranston, looking very proud, handed Davies a telegram. It was from San Antonio.

> Department Commander commends Major Cranston on brilliant success in capturing and destroying bandit forces.

Davies looked up, startled.

"Why—I thought—I understood it was forbidden even to return fire from Mexican bandits."

"Oh," said Cranston lightly, "that order was rescinded and an agreement made with the Mexican government, allowing us to cross in pursuit of bandits."

Davies, who had firmly expected a court martial, could scarcely believe the news. But as Sergeant Bannion remarked when he heard it—

"Shure, and Oi'd almost rather be kilt intoirly than scared to dith!"

MANHATTAN NOCTURNE

The Odyssey of a Metropolitan Taxicab Driver

By WILLIAM CORCORAN

IT WAS hot, with the sticky sultriness that settles on New York in the dog days. Above Manhattan the hazy sky shone crimson with Broadway's brilliant glare, as if a vast furnace door were open to the night. Asphalt patches in the streets were malodorous and soft. It was summer, and New York suffered.

Timmy Fallon had long since raised wide open the taxicab windshield. He had removed his coat, his cap and his necktie, in defiance of the Police Department edict governing the garb of city hackmen. And, as he felt the back draft of the motor in his face, he considered in profane desperation the expedient of taking off his shirt.

Many of Timmy's confreres had accepted the weather with true hackman's philosophy, and they had vanished from the streets. Business was at a standstill anyway. But Timmy was driven by a grave and desperate need. He wanted twenty dollars by morning. On the morrow he must acquire and affix to his windshield a small paper sticker. This sticker affirmed that he had paid his insurance for the current month. And the insurance premium was thirty dollars. So far, out of the preceding days' slender earnings, Timmy had gathered but ten dollars. These earnings had been sadly depleted by a fine and loss of revenue during a ten day suspension of license imposed on Timmy—to his intense disgust—for a conviction on a charge of illegal parking. He had twenty yet to go. And the missing twenty loomed before him like a huge, empty gap in the universe.

Timmy felt of the slender store of cash in his pocket.

"Five bucks! One pound after pushing this load of iron around all night. Three pounds to go." He groaned. "Jeez, if something don't happen, and damn quick, here's one hackman that's going to give

them a chance to tell the truth the next time they call us a lot of crooks and bandits."

Two blocks ahead, as Timmy rolled down Sixth Avenue, a figure stood at 19th Street under the corner lamplight. It was a slender, short skirted figure, a young woman unquestionably easy to look at. She wore a floppy, wide straw hat, and a figured dress of some light material that clung boldly to her firm, lithe young body.

Timmy Fallon spied her. He stepped on the gas. He forgot about removing his clammy shirt, for a woman standing alone on a Sixth Avenue corner meant one thing—business for a hackman. And it meant business, Timmy vowed by all the saints and angels, for this particular hackman. The taxi sped with racing motor for the corner.

Out of 19th Street at that moment another cab came coasting, in search of a fare. Its driver instantly was taken with an ambition similar to Timmy's. The girl drew back in alarm as two horns squawked, two sets of brakes squealed, and two taxis jerked to a halt against the curb, bumper to bumper.

"Taxi, lady?" cried the newcomer. "Here's your taxi!"

"Taxi, hell!" said Timmy. "Get that scow away from here." He was out of the seat and opening the door. "O. K., miss, right here. Here's your cab."

The young woman laughed and looked from one to the other. She considered them at leisure.

The newcomer was a lean, dark skinned, bright eyed individual. His glance toward Timmy was a quick and silent threat. Timmy was smaller in stature, but he was solidly built on close-to-the-ground lines which do not advertise all the strength such a build can possess. He had a good nose and mouth that spoke of rugged Celtic forebears. He had in addition a pair of bluish gray eyes that spoke of many things, including a complete willingness to lick anybody to a standstill who interfered with him at this moment.

The girl waved a hand at the other cab in dismissal. She addressed Timmy.

"You'll do, I guess."

She climbed in the dark interior of the taxi. Timmy slammed the door and slid behind the wheel.

From the cab ahead came a shout of resentful derision.

"All right, cowboy, take it! Take it,

and while you're at it take a good long jump in the river." There was more, of a sort not calculated to soothe the ears of a lady.

Timmy squirmed out of his seat. He stepped quickly up beside the wheel of the other taxi.

"What was that?" he asked. His voice betrayed curiosity, even eagerness. "Say that over again, bud. Go ahead; say it again."

The bright dark eyes of the disappointed one glared, but he was silent.

"Well," said Timmy. "All right, then. I thought you said something." He turned half away, his gaze still fixed on the lean man. His lip curled. "You yellow rat," he snarled, "if you don't get out of here on the button, you'll get your face shoved in! Beat it!"

The empty cab backed away, started forward, and was gone down the Avenue under the L structure. The incident was over. Timmy would not likely ever meet the fellow again. He smiled and shrugged a philosophic shoulder.

Timmy strode back to his own machine and resumed his seat. He thrust his head inside the window.

"Sorry, miss. I had to ask him a personal question. Where do we go now?"

The girl sat forward, and for a space did not answer. She seemed to be considering something, and when she spoke there was a change in her manner.

"Big boy, I want you to do me a favor. I guess I can trust you."

The heart of Timmy Fallon sank within him. He had had other encounters with young women passengers who wanted favors and who trusted him.

"Sure, sister," he said dubiously. "What can we do for you?"

"I want you to take a guy home for me. I want you to take him straight home, see? He's in a place up the street here a ways, and he's plastered to the gills. I can't take him home, and I can't leave him there. I want to turn the job over to you."

Timmy promptly sensed profit, but he sensed also much that was to be approached warily.

"Has he passed out?" he asked.

The girl shrugged.

"Oh, he probably has by now, the sap! Listen—"

"No," said Timmy abruptly. "No drunks."

"Why not?" she demanded. "You'll get paid."

"Nothing doing. I wouldn't have him."

"All right. But why?"

"I know too many guys got in trouble with rides like this. I know one had a stiff left on his hands."

"What?" said the girl, startled and amused. "Say, you got a lot of nerve, big boy. Don't be dumb. If I had any stiffs on my hands I wouldn't be sitting here on a street corner telling the world about it." She laughed shortly. "Anyway, big boy, just try handling this guy for a while and see how much of a corpse he is."

"Yeh?" returned Timmy skeptically. "Well, how much is in it for me?"

"Plenty." She smiled, as if with understanding. "Forget it and quit worrying. Shoot down the street here a ways till I tell you to stop."

"Well, I'll take a look. We'll see."

TIMMY turned the cab down the side street and coasted along between the darkened, silent houses. He wore an air of reluctance tempered with necessity—at least twenty dollars worth of necessity.

They stopped, on the girl's direction, before a four story brick building which once had been a private dwelling of gracious respectability. Now, as did countless others about the city, it wore that faded respectability like a mask. Its floors were portioned off into tiny apartments, and its basement discreetly harbored a speakeasy.

The girl ordered Timmy to follow her. As she stepped into the darkened areaway the lock of the iron grille door clicked. The girl pushed it open, and they entered the blackness beyond. The iron grille closed with a muffled crash. Instantly a small electric bulb overhead

cast its light upon them, and an eye peered through a small round peephole; inside a heavy steel bar rumbled out of place, and the door opened. A man stood aside to admit them to a hallway dimly illuminated with saffron colored bulbs.

"Get a rig, Marge?" asked the man conversationally.

"Yeh, I got one, Joe. Is Marty all right?"

"Sure. Go right in."

"Come on, big boy," the girl ordered, and Timmy followed her down the hall. They passed through a door which opened on a room brilliantly lighted and weirdly decorated with wicker furniture, parchment lamps and much green and orange paint.

There were two men in the room. One was a small, coatless man wearing pink sleeve garters, and a pale, sardonic smile. He sat in a wicker arm chair across a table from a large bodied, heavy featured fellow who sprawled with weary bewilderment in a similar seat. The big man wore clothes of excellent cut and quiet hue, but his heavy muscled frame made them seem ill fitting and awry. Without question he was drunk, but in his eyes, shaded beneath thick brown brows, glowed a quick and perverse intelligence.

"Hello, Marty," said the girl. "How you feeling now?"

The big man looked at her.

"What you mean, feelin'? I look like anything's wrong with me?"

"Hell, no, Marty," reassured the man with the sleeve garters. "Marge is trying to look out for you, that's all."

"Yeh? Well, get right for once, sweetheart." He heaved himself to an upright position and peered at Timmy, who stood behind the girl near the door. "Who's your boy friend?" he demanded.

"He's got a cab outside for you," said Marge. "He'll take you home."

Marty spent a moment in profound thought.

"All right," he said presently, with dim resentment in his voice. "I'll go home. I know when to go home. You think I'm drunk, don't you? Well—" He paused. "Say, wait a minute. Get the boy friend a drink. Get him a drink, Tom. Come on, snap into it!"

The man with the sleeve garters got up and passed from the room through a doorway hung with brilliant orange drapes. There was a thin line of worry on the girl's forehead, but she made no move to interfere. Instead she came close to Marty's chair, and stroked his flushed face gently.

"You'll go right home like a good boy, won't you, Marty? You won't take any more to drink tonight, will you?"

The big man looked up at her.

"No. I get you, honey. No more." He seemed to take pleasure in her soft caress. Then, as troubled thought revolved in his mind, he jerked away and spoke gruffly. "What the hell! Suppose I do? You think I'm afraid? You think I give a hoot in hell for that lousy bunch of—"

The girl's hand covered his mouth, muffling the rest of that defiance. The orange drapes parted and the man with the sleeve garters returned, bearing a tray and two glasses, one small and ruddy with whisky, the other large and sparkling with carbonated water. He spoke through quick lips.

"Cut that, Marty."

Marty removed the girl's hand and stared at the man.

"Who you giving orders to?"

The corners of the sardonic one's mouth turned up faintly.

"I ain't giving orders to nobody. But when you're drunk you think you're the Angel Gabriel or something. You don't need to be told."

"You ain't telling me nothing! You low worm, if I thought—"

"Please, Marty!" begged the girl, again stopping his speech.

The big man threw aside her hand.

"Will you leave me alone for a minute? Jeez, am I an orphan or something?" His heavy voice rose. "What the hell's the matter with the bunch of you? I'm going to do as I damn' well feel like doing. You nor that lousy wop and all his gang ain't

going to dictate to me. If I get bumped off I get bumped, and it's me has to stand for it, ain't it?"

The girl's face was strained and pale. She dropped suddenly and unexpectedly to her knees and hid her face in her hands against the arm of the chair. Marty gazed uncertainly at the gray felt hat for a moment. Then he put out his heavy hand and touched her shoulder.

"It's all right, kid. Jeez, I'm just shooting off my mouth again. Don't mind me. I'll go home."

The girl's hand crept out and gripped his.

Timmy, standing by the door with the two glasses in his hand, staring at all this, abruptly drank the whisky in one swallow. Tom held out the tray to retrieve the glasses, and disappeared for a second. Then, returning, he said to the room at large—

"Well, all set?"

Timmy's shrewd, observing eyes were faintly dubious, but he drew on his thin cotton gloves with a gesture of decision.

"I'm ready," he said. "Where am I supposed to go?"

The girl came to her feet, holding tightly to the big man's hand.

"Come on, Marty. Up!"

Big Marty got up. He swayed slightly. Dim anger struggled within him.

"Jeez, I could still drink Johnny Walker under the table, and I can't even walk straight. Give me a hand, Tom. Come on, boy friend, show us your taxi. I'm going home." He started for the door; then with an exclamation he brought all proceedings to a halt. "Wait till I look at my flask. I ain't going without my private stock."

He drew from a rear pocket a flat silver flask and shook it. It seemed well filled. Satisfied, he resumed his journey.

THEY filed out of the green and orange room into the saffron twilight of the hallway, while Joe peered cautiously through the peephole into the night.

Joe and Tom, offering their burden genial encouragement, maneuvered big Marty outside and into the rear seat of the taxi. The girl gripped Timmy's arm in the areaway and talked to him earnestly.

"Take care of him, big boy. Take good care of him for me, won't you? He needs to go right home. Don't take him anywhere else, no matter what."

"Who is this guy, anyway?" asked Timmy.

"Never mind who he is. If you don't know, so much the better for you."

"Yeh, but what's all the shouting for? Is there any danger?"

"Oh, none for you!"

"But lots for him, eh? It still don't look so good. Where does he live?"

"In the Bronx. And you quit worrying about yourself. If you take him home like you're told he'll pay you and he'll pay you well. He always does."

"Well—"

"The address is 391 Brook Avenue, near 143rd Street."

"He got a family there to take him over?"

"Yes," said the girl.

"Oh. I see. All right, sister."

Tom was entering the areaway.

"Come on. Get going before he changes his mind."

Timmy shook his head, with resignation and lingering doubt, and got going.

For some time, while they sped up Sixth Avenue, there came only silence from the interior of the cab. Timmy wondered whether the big fellow were asleep. If so, Timmy was in luck. His passenger was in an errant and impulsive mood, and obviously he was accustomed to having his own way. Timmy knew others like big Marty, and he walked warily in their presence. They were gunmen, gang leaders, fighters. They were not merely criminals, for though they scorned the law, they had greater scorn for all petty crooks. They were guards, watchmen and ministers of gang retribution. They were the police of the modern underworld.

But best of all, they were generous in

payment to those who served them. Timmy, for the first time that evening, began to feel optimistic about his twenty dollars.

PRESENTLY they were in the Park, speeding along the leafy avenues of the city's playground. It was cooler here. Timmy felt it, and was grateful. Big Marty felt it, and came to life. He moved heavily and sat on the forward seat so that he leaned out of the window beside Timmy.

"Hey, boy friend! Where we going?"

"Home," said Timmy.

"My home?"

"Sure."

The big man reflected.

"That's right," he said. "Marge told you to take me home, didn't she?"

"Yep."

The big man was moved in spirit.

"That's Marge," he said. "That's her all over. She's a real pal, brother, and they ain't any better. If you ever see any better, you just let me know. I'd like to see one. Just let me know, understand?"

"Sure," said Timmy.

There was a reflective interval.

"What?" said the big man suddenly.

"Sure. I meant 'yes, of course'."

"Of course what?"

"What you were saying!"

"Oh, yeh! What I was saying. What was I saying? Oh, about going home. Listen, I don't want to go home. I ain't going home."

"Sure you are! We're almost there."

"No. I ain't going home. I'll tell you. Take me to Dolan's. You know Dolan's?"

"No," said Timmy. "I'd never be able to find it. I better take you home first."

"Say, will you stop talking about taking me home? We ain't going home, I told you."

"Well, you promised Margie—"

The big man's conscience abruptly troubled him.

"Yeh, I promised her I'd go home." He paused morosely. "But what the hell? Suppose you were nuts about a girl, and she won't have nothing to do with you because you're married. Nothing but sending you home all the time and—oh, rats! Drive to Dolan's. 118th and Columbus."

Now Timmy felt under no obligation to worry unduly about his passenger. If any man chose to go hunting trouble, that was his business. But Timmy had promised to do his best to deliver the big man to his proper destination.

"What the hell you want to go to Dolan's for?" he demanded.

"To find a skunk who's trying to find me, and tell him where he gets off at. The wop, Pete Cassela; that's who. Now will you get going?"

"Ain't you likely to get in a jam?"

"No, I ain't likely to get in no jam!" said big Marty, with a voice that decidedly held no fear. "Listen to me. You see this?" He held out for Timmy's startled inspection a .38 Colt automatic. "I keep that handy under my left arm. Any crawling, sneaking, double crossing East Side rat thinks he can get me before I get him, got another think coming. Now head west and go where I told you."

Timmy headed west. He turned at the very next drive crossing. It was no time to argue. Big Marty, with his gun in his hand, was no mere helpless drunk on his way home. He was a formidable if erratic minded gun fighter who gave orders and saw that they were obeyed.

They rode in silence. Out of the park they coasted, and drove north on Columbus Avenue between the lofty "L" pillars. At 118th Street Marty directed Timmy to turn west. They stopped before a row of dark and deserted brick buildings of uncertain age. Before them was a decayed shop, once a small cigar store, to judge by the barely legible sign on the unwashed window. Not a light could be seen.

"You come along in with me," ordered Marty as he emerged from the cab. "We won't be long."

Timmy eyed the man, and glanced at

the houses before him. He thought of declining the invitation. But that held the possibility that Marty might forget him, that he might go off with somebody else in another taxi, that he might remain inside till dawn while Timmy waited vainly for his money. Timmy wished he had insisted a little more about going home.

"All right," he said. "Just so we ain't too long."

THE RITUAL of the secret places was performed again, this time through a peephole in the wall alongside the door of the old tobacco shop. An eye appeared there, a disembodied, inhospitable eye. It surveyed them coldly.

"Well?" said big Marty. "Come on. Let us in."

The eye disappeared. A panel slid into place. In a moment light glowed in the tiny orifice again, and another eye viewed them.

"What's the big idea?" demanded Marty. "You know me. Open up that door."

And the door was forthwith opened.

It was Dolan himself who admitted them, a little man gone to stoutness, who wore a beaming, artificial smile. In his tie was a two carat diamond stickpin. His cordial greeting held a shade of diffidence.

"Hello, Marty! How's the boy? Come right in."

They entered a room that ran half way back through the old store. It was amateurishly decorated with green and brown paint, and several second hand mahogany saloon tables with cheap chairs stood about. Through a rear door another room was visible, decorated in lighter style with nightmarish murals and soft lights. A side door led off to whatever manner of kitchen the place supported.

Marty stalked through to the inner room, ignoring the dozen men who silently watched his passage. They were men of mean faces and vigilant eyes. There was a significance to their silence that Timmy could not fathom.

In the inner room the two were alone. A radio wailed a soulful and interminable ballad. They sat down at a marble topped table. Marty settled heavily into his chair, his big body still ungainly with liquor. But in his eyes that perverse intelligence shone brightly.

Dolan joined them.

"Well, boys, what'll it be? Rye? Got some of the real McCoy in today."

"Make it rye," said Marty. "And then come back here. I want to talk to you."

The big man paid no attention to Timmy as they sat waiting alone. Timmy watched him covertly, smoking a cigaret and saying nothing. The twenty dollars were not in too great danger yet, and if Marty drank enough to pass out, everything would be jake, completely jake. Timmy would deliver him, collect a good round sum from the family, and have the rest of the night left to earn the balance of the desired amount.

When Dolan brought them liquor and drew a chair up to the table, Marty shot a question at him.

"Listen, Dolan. Where's Pete the Wop?"

Dolan's eyes registered innocence.

"I don't know."

"The hell you don't!"

"It's a fact, Marty. I ain't seen him."

Marty's large mouth spread in an ugly grin.

"I didn't ask if you saw him. You know damn' well Pete's trying to find me. And I know he's advertising his whereabouts so's some rat can tip him off where I'm at. Where was he when you last heard?"

Dolan sipped his drink.

"I'll come clear with you, Marty. I heard he was coming up the West Side tonight. Whether he's coming here I don't know. If I knew I'd tell you. I don't want to see either of you here, to be frank; not while this is going on."

Marty raised his glass to drink. He spilled some of the whisky over his hand. He regarded the drink for a moment, and then flung the glass across the room, where

it landed with a tiny crash against the wall.

"I'm through drinking tonight. I got a date with Pete Cassela. They told me he was coming here. Maybe I been dodging him and maybe I ain't, but when this night's over there ain't going to be any more dodging necessary between Pete and me."

Dolan placed his glass gently on the table.

"You going to pull a dirty trick like that on me, Marty?"

"Listen to me, you lousy double-crosser," said Marty, leaning across the table. "I don't give two cents for you and you don't for me. It's going to be up to your friend Pete what happens here tonight. I ain't been looking for Pete, have I? I ain't got nothing against him. I trimmed him on a deal, and he's sore. You know what deal, too. I been keeping out of his way because I thought he'd cool off in a few days. Since he ain't, I'm going to give him his chance to square things. If you're scared of somebody being bumped off in your place tonight you can blame it on that stoolpigeon pal of yours, Pete the Wop!" Marty slapped the table with his big hand. "You get that, Dolan? You taking it? Are you taking it?"

Dolan's face, at first red, now was white.

"Yeh, I'm taking it," he said.

TIMMY was too interested in the drama of this moment to consider the full weight of jeopardy threatening his twenty bucks. Big Marty seemed as intensely sober as man ever could be. Little flecks of fire leaped from his eyes, kindled by the murderous, subdued wrath inside him. Dolan was scared so that the blood drained from his cheeks, yet he met big Marty's gaze. Inanely the radio loud-speaker blatted its soulful ballad into the electric air of the room.

The deadlock was broken in a manner totally unexpected. A big man, with the scars of the prize ring on his face, ducked his head inside the door from the front room. His eyes were wide.

"Dolan! The cops!"

Dolan jumped from the chair.

"Get the liquor. I'll open up." He turned to Marty. "Got any jewelry? Better let me have it."

"No," said Marty, "I ain't got any jewelry."

Dolan disappeared into the front room. They heard his voice there, and they heard too the peremptory knocking on the outer door.

"Give us your jewelry, boys. Come on, quick. They'll bust down that door in a minute."

Timmy leaned from the table and looked into the front room. Dolan was moving swiftly about, and the dozen patrons were hastily depositing in his hands whatever manner of weapon they carried on their persons. There were several revolvers and a couple of brass knuckles. Dolan carried them through the side door leading to the private quarters of the place. Almost instantly he returned, and was at the front door throwing back the heavy bolt.

"All right, boys," he said cordially.

Three large men stood in the entrance, casting a swift and expert scrutiny over the room. They were red cheeked, hard eyed; they were men of resource and nerve. They were, to any knowing eye, special squad men from headquarters.

Timmy gripped big Marty's arm.

"Give me that rod."

Marty held the edge of the table with white knuckles.

"They crossed me. The dirty stool pigeons, they doublecrossed me!"

"No, they didn't," said Timmy. "These bulls are just giving the place the once over. Will you give me that gat?"

Marty stared at his taxi driver.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Give me it!"

Big Marty surrendered the weapon. Timmy placed it on a chair on the other side of the table, deposited his driver's cap and cotton gloves on top of the pistol, and moved the chair a little apart to one side.

Casual and innocent the chair stood there, the temporary resting place of a pair of cheap gloves and a battered cap, and, so far as the eye could see, of nothing more.

In the other room one of the detectives was rapidly frisking every one in sight. Another entered the side door to look over the environs beyond. The third, accompanied by Dolan, walked into the rear room. He stood for a moment in the entrance.

"Well, Marty! Surprised to see you in this dump."

"Don't be," said Marty. "I've seen funnier places than this."

"Yeh? Who's your friend?"

Timmy thumbed his hack badge.

"Cab's outside," he said.

The detective nodded.

"Well, boys, carrying anything tonight?"

"No," said Marty.

"All right, let's see."

He saw, and made certain of their innocence by a rapid passage of hands over the clothing of both men. Dolan stood aside, his eyes narrowed and inscrutable. The only incriminating object the search revealed on big Marty was the flask. The detective unscrewed the cap, sniffed at the contents, and handed it back. Liquor was of no interest to him. He glanced about the room, walked over and lifted the lid of the radio to look inside, drew a cigar from his pocket and lighted it, and then departed with a brief and pregnant farewell.

"I'm kind of sorry you haven't got a gun tonight, Marty. Pete the Wop's on the war path. Take my advice and go home."

And they were left alone.

The detectives departed soon after. Dolan made a jocular ceremony of returning the weapons to his customers in the outer room. Then he joined one of the groups at a table.

TIMMY could hear the low voiced conversation outside, the quick, sardonic laughter, nervous with excitement after the recent visit. He stared at Marty, who sat slumped in his seat, chewing a match and staring with sullen eyes at the vacant door.

"Well," said Timmy, "when we going home?" The last words of the headquarters man had not been reassuring. And there was still that twenty bucks to get.

"We'll go home soon enough. Take a drink. Take a walk. Take anything, only stop talking about going home."

"Sure," agreed Timmy. "I'll get a drink."

He shoved back his chair, and walked out of the room. Dolan looked up. Timmy caught his eye and made a little motion of his head signifying a desire for speech. Dolan hesitated, rose and walked across the floor.

"Say, Dolan," said Timmy, "what's likely to come off here tonight?"

Dolan studied him.

"How much do you know?"

"Nothing. I just picked up this guy downtown."

"Where?"

"I ain't saying. All I'm interested in is my fare. What I want to know is my chances of collecting on this ride."

Dolan uttered a short, nasty laugh.

"Probably not much—if a certain guy he's looking for shows up." He turned about. "Wait a minute. Somebody at the door."

Timmy edged back toward the rear room. Dolan peered through the peephole, and then swung the heavy front door wide to the night. A short, stocky, dark featured man paused there, and entered. He walked slowly, with a slight swagger, hands in pockets, and he cast a cold, black eye on every man in the room as he came. His gaze lingered on Timmy a little longer than on the others, apparently took note of the large nickel hack badge on his breast, and continued around the room. He halted and waited till Dolan had refastened the door and come to him with a suave greeting.

"Anybody here?" the newcomer asked.

Timmy, watching them, knew that Dolan, as he faced away, winked one eye faintly. Dolan's reply was in the nega-

tive. The newcomer nodded casually. He discovered an acquaintance or two in the gathering and gave them a brief, almost sour greeting.

Timmy leaned against the wall and took out a cigaret. He touched a lighted match to its end, flicked the match away, and turned and entered the rear room. At the table Marty remained as he had left him. Timmy moved quickly and spoke close to his ear.

"A guy just came in. I think it's him. Snap out of it."

Big Marty's head jerked sidewise and his dark gaze bored into Timmy's eyes.

"Come on," said Timmy. "You wanted it. Now do something. Let's get the hell out of here or anything you like."

Marty rose slowly. His big body paused beside the table. Then he moved suddenly and strode into the outer room. Timmy watched him go. Just what he had started, Timmy could not venture to predict. But whatever happened, it was bound to have some influence on the matter of that twenty bucks. He moved to follow.

And then he saw the cap and gloves on the chair.

They were undisturbed. Beneath them, out of sight but so important, reposed the .38 automatic. Big Marty had forgotten. And the man he was to meet carried a gun gripped in the hand that was thrust deep in the coat pocket on his right side.

Timmy jerked the cap on his head. He picked up the light gloves, and hefted the pistol in his hand. Then he walked softly to the door and leaned casually against the jamb. The pistol remained behind his back.

The two men faced each other in the center of the floor. They were talking, in voices which carried a queer timbre of enmity. Each stood immobile, not a muscle quivering. Only their eyes revealed the emotions seething within them.

"I been waiting," big Marty was saying. "I been waiting for you, bozo. I heard you was looking for me.. so I came to save you the trouble."

"Yeh?" said the swarthy man.

"You got something to say to me. Well, say it and say it quick. You're getting your chance, and by Jeez, you better use it!"

For a moment the other refrained from answering. His quick eyes darted from side to side and returned. Faintly a nerve in his upper lip jerked once.

TIMMY watched. His quickened sight saw each slightest sign, each imperceptible signal that passed in the desperate immobility of that room. His heart pounded mightily and perspiration was on his brow. He edged forward a trifle and his hand came from behind his back, with the gun.

"Pete!" he said.

The swarthy one's glance shot beyond big Marty.

"Pete," said Timmy, "come here."

No one moved. Some one at the tables choked nervously and swallowed.

"Pete," whispered Timmy, "if you don't come here before I've finished telling you—"

Pete the Wop moved. He strode slowly forward past big Marty. Marty turned suddenly about and stared.

"Marty," said Timmy, "take this guy's rod away from him."

Big Marty's left hand rose and wavered at his armpit. Sudden realization came to him then. He moved with a light quickness that denied all the liquor he had drunk, and gripped Pete's right arm. His hand slipped into Pete's coat pocket and wrested from the gunman's stubborn fingers the gun which was even at that moment a hair's breadth from stunning discharge.

Pete the Wop swore, softly and viciously.

"Shut up!" said Marty. The gunman paid no attention; his eyes glittered. Big Marty slapped him across the face and the gunman abruptly subsided.

Big Marty swung about. Timmy's gun had menaced the whole room, and now another joined it.

"You, Dolan," said Marty. "You and

your whole gang! You got anything to say?"

Only silence answered him.

"You better keep your traps shut. I'm telling you. And you know me."

He turned to the murderous captive.

"Head for the door, Wop. You're coming with me."

Pete the Wop headed for the door. Big Marty followed close. And slowly, tensely alert, Timmy came after.

Marty threw the bolt on the door and drew it open. It slammed against the wall.

"Outside, bum!" he ordered. "And not too fast. Get in that cab."

Timmy drew the door partly closed.

"Keep away from this door for a few minutes," he advised those who remained behind. "It won't be healthy for any of you outside."

He jerked the door to with a crash, and ran for the driver's seat of his taxi.

There were two pressing worries on Timmy's mind as he sent the cab racing to the corner and northward on Columbus Avenue. Foremost and inescapable was the need of twenty dollars. Second was the dread of violence in his cab. It was no lightly punishable misdemeanor, this gun waving and kidnaping. If big Marty made it any worse—heaven help another hackman! Timmy had made a desperate play to save the only bit of ready money in sight, and now his sole remaining resources were prayer and dumb hope.

They were talking inside. He could catch but an occasional word. Nevertheless he could feel the sinister undercurrent of big Marty's discourse. Occasionally Pete replied with snarling defiance. Timmy strained to follow the conversation. And then Marty's voice rose in peremptory command.

"Head for the Concourse, boy friend, and keep going till I tell you. And shut that window behind you."

With the rear closed off, Timmy could hear the droning motor at his feet and nothing more. He drove north steadily, to the Grand Concourse and out along its stately traffic lanes. He shrank inwardly at the sight of each strolling policeman, and his very soul perspired. But still he drove, ever northward, mounting the streets of the city like a ladder.

At the end of the Grand Concourse, where that great highway meets Mosholu Parkway and both run smack into Jerome Avenue, the window behind Timmy snapped open and big Marty's voice ordered him to stop. He drew up at the curbing.

Out of the cab door stepped Pete the Wop, and right behind him came Marty. Marty's hand was in his coat pocket. So was the automatic he had confiscated. Pete stood on the grass of the little island in the broad thoroughfare and waited.

"Well, rat, we understand each other better now, don't we?" asked Marty.

Pete preserved his sullen silence.

"Answer me, you—"

"Yeh," said Pete. "I understand."

"You'll get a lot wiser as you grow up, Pete. You got a lot to learn yet, but you're making headway. And don't forget, whenever you're feeling particularly dumb again, just let me know and I'll put you wise."

"Yeh?" snarled Pete.

"Yeh," assured big Marty. "Now beat it." He brought his hand out of the coat pocket. The automatic accompanied it. "Let's see how fast you can travel. On the lam!"

Pete started off. He looked back. His feet moved faster and he broke into a run, placing a tree between himself and his enemy.

Marty chuckled to himself as he watched. His hand brought up the pistol as though tempted sorely to send a shot after the fugitive for luck.

Out of the cab seat came Timmy.

"Marty, for God's sake don't! There's a cop's booth up the block. Put it away."

Marty burst into royal laughter.

"Did you see him run for it? Pete the killer! Pete who was out to get big Marty! Boy, he won't show his face anywhere for a month. Not after what I put up to him. He's through!"

TIMMY smiled. His knees were, strangely enough, a little shaky. But he beamed.

"That was telling him! You must have told him plenty."

"I can tell anybody plenty," said big Marty.

Timmy believed him.

"Well, I ain't a bit sorry that's over," he said. "And where do we go now? We all set to go home?"

Marty's good spirits swiftly dwindled.

"Yeh, I guess so. Jeez, what a break after a night like this. Home!"

Timmy wisely made no comment. He returned to his seat and big Marty climbed into the interior. Timmy was about to shift into gear when Marty's voice halted him.

"Hey, boy friend! Have a drink before we start. We'll need one."

Marty extended his flask through the window hospitably. Timmy made a pretense of swallowing some of its fiery contents.

"Thanks. Pretty good stuff."

"You're a liar," said Marty without rancor. "It's lousy stuff. Go on; get me home."

They pulled away from the curb and turned south. The control lights were darkened for the night, and there was little traffic. Past the tall, white and silent cliffs they flew; cliffs that were the dwellings of respectable people long since a-bed. The cool midnight wind rushed through the open windshield. The breeze was soothing to Timmy's brow, and the stillness was balm to his soul. They were homeward bound at last.

Big Marty lived in a red brick flat house on a dingy street. Timmy read the number by the light of a street lamp, and drew up at the curb. He got out and opened the taxi door.

"Here we are, Marty. All out."

There came no response, either of word or movement.

"Hey, Marty! Snap out of it. We're home."

This drew a grunt and a vague stirring within. Timmy climbed inside and shook the big man.

"Come on, boy. Let's go."

"Huh?"

"We're home."

"Home? My home?"

"Sure."

"Oh, sure," said Marty with plaintive injury. "Would be my home! Why you always picking on my home?"

Big Marty was drunk. He was royally and completely plastered. With his flask for company, he had painstakingly prepared himself for the welcome that awaited his arrival upstairs.

After much heaving and grunting, Timmy got the big man out on the sidewalk. He thought the occasion judicious, and returned to Marty the gun he had carried since the scene at Dolan's, slipping it into the big man's pocket. Marty was too absorbed to notice. His equilibrium was gone. He clung to the cab, clung to Timmy, and clung to the doorway when they navigated that far. Into the dark hallway they ventured, and up the stairs. There were three flights to climb.

"My wife ain't a bad woman," Marty explained. "She's a good woman, and don't you forget it. You ought to be me and try to forget it. She's just touchy, understand? You know, touchy."

"Sure, I know."

"Don't you let her—"

A voice came from the landing above. It fairly vibrated with wrath.

"Marty! Is that you?"

"Oh, Jeez," said Marty. "That's her sounding off now. Wait a minute. Here's some money."

The big man dug into his pocket. He fumbled about, and tried another pocket. After several attempts, he collected a fistful of coins and pressed them into Timmy's hand. It was too dark to count them. Marty's heart took a leap. Was this all?

"All right, boy friend. You were a great help. See you again some time."

"Uh-huh," said Timmy. "Is this—say, is this all you got to give me?"

"That's everything I got. It's plenty. Good night."

Timmy stood his ground.

"But Marty! There's three or four

bucks on the clock. Don't I get a break?"

Came the voice above.

"Will you get up here, you drunken bum, you! I'll come down and settle you and your friend both if you don't get up out of that hall."

"Aw, raspberries," Marty said. But he added, "I'm coming."

And he staggered his way upstairs.

Timmy was stunned. He could feel hardly more than a dozen coins in his hand. They were probably twenty-five cent pieces mostly, but even that would not repay him for his services this evening. He took a step to follow upward. But the storm of invective that broke up there held him in dismay.

While he hesitated, the door slammed. The angry voices became muffled. The hall was empty.

A MOMENT passed, and then Timmy took sudden resolve and mounted the stairs. He stood at the door and firmly knocked. He did not have to wait long. The door flew open and a formidable red faced woman in gaudy negligée confronted him.

"What the hell do you want?"

"I want my money," said Timmy stoutly.

"Who are you?"

"The taxi driver."

"My husband paid you. I heard him. Now get the hell out of this house."

"I want my money!"

The woman turned away from the door. In a second a milk bottle came flying out of the darkness to which she had retreated. Timmy ducked, and it smashed against the plaster wall across the landing.

"You won't, eh? You're another of my husband's drunken friends, ain't you? Well, take that, you—"

The situation was a deadly serious one. Timmy had his doubts about the strict sobriety of the woman herself. She was a sizable creature, and she came bearing vicious weapons. He fled, taking the stairs three at a time.

On a lower landing Timmy was comparatively safe. He stood for a moment listening to the abuse that came from above. The door slammed loudly a second time. Once again the hall was still and quiet. Evidently the neighbors discreetly refrained from investigating such affairs as these. Timmy was alone.

It was a hard thing to accept, but Timmy knew when he was licked. He had driven taxicabs too long to fail in judgment now. If this were an ordinary case, he might call a policeman and bring him along to back up his demand for payment. But in view of Marty's profession, and in further view of the activities in which Timmy had shared that night, he did not dare call on the law. There was no recourse. He was licked. He continued his descent of the stairs.

Out beside his cab, Timmy stood a moment in sober thought. He was up against it, cold. The street lamp cast its softened light over the pavement at his feet. Abruptly he felt in his pocket for the change Big Marty had given him. He held it out in the palm of his hand to count it. For the last time that evening his heart did a complete somersault within his breast.

"Oh, Jeez—will you look!" he invited himself.

The incredible rushed over him. He fingered the coins in disbelief. He took a substantial bite at two of them to assure himself of their reality. They were genuine, beyond question. Big Marty had not failed him after all. Through some queer whim or accident he had paid for his long ride in a handful of dimes and quarters . . . and two ten dollar gold pieces!

Timmy Fallon jumped into the cab and sent it racing away from the curb. Down the street he traveled, and tore around the corner on two wheels. And homeward he went, with the accelerator button pressed to the floor, and with a song rising above the roar of the motor that caused two cops on Willis Avenue to cease swinging their nightsticks and stare in amazement after him.

The HEEL *of* DISCIPLINE

A Grim and Powerful Story of the Men who Follow the Sea

By

RALPH R. PERRY

"IF A SAILOR don't do his duty it's mutiny . . ."

With two words, Jimmy Neale demolished that argument.

"Duty nothing!" he said scornfully.

The foredeck of the schooner, *Jessie Snow*, was dark, and the cigaret he jerked from his lips traced a red arc as he pointed out the running lights of another schooner, identical in build and rig, which lay becalmed, half a mile ahead.

"I wasn't refusing duty. I didn't have beef enough to handle the jib sheet alone, so that slit eyed Down East mate aimed a kick at me when he came to help. Mr. Eri wasn't thinking of my duty, nor his to the ship or the owners, Hank. Before we left Cuba, Captain Slocum and Mr. Eri bet a thousand dollars we'd beat that schooner home to Bangor. She's gained six hours on us already. They're worried stiff, so that two fingered bucko takes his temper out in hazing us."

"Yeah. The steward told me what the

officers were saying at supper, too. It'll be all hands on deck and pulley-haul the whole voyage home," answered Hank gloomily. "But if a mate wants to kick ye, he kicks. That is, in sail. Steamer mates is more judicious like. Aboard here ye can dodge, if you're spry enough."

"They didn't think enough of us foremast hands to tell us there was a race!" Jimmy's voice rose indignantly. "It's a private bet, and because they get full of bad judgment and West Indy rum I'm not going to be kicked to work!"

"Pipe down! Mr. Eri'll hear ye!"

"Let him!"

On the horizon, there was an echoless mutter of thunder, but around the *Jessie Snow* the sea was very still. Wind was coming, but as yet the ocean's glassy swells were unrippled, and the gentle lap of the water against the schooner's sides did not prevent Jimmy's defiance from being audible from stem to stern. Aft, by the binnacle, Mr. Eri did hear.

Not a muscle of the mate's thin lipped face moved, but his maimed right hand closed on the sandbag that served him for a fist. Years before a rope had jammed his hand against a block. The accident left him only a forefinger and a thumb, but no skipper had been able to say he was a less redoubtable bucko on that account. A twelve inch roll of canvas as thick as a bologna sausage, loosely packed with sand, more than compensated for the lost fingers in keeping discipline.

When he stepped out of the binnacle light he smiled. He relished the task before him. Fifteen minutes more and the wind would come. It would be drive, drive, drive all the voyage home; Captain Slocum driving the vessel, he driving the crew. Only by work and by taking chances could they hope to win a bet that had indeed been made in the exhilarated overconfidence of alcohol, and to cow the crew an example was necessary.

The canvas fist swung experimentally in Mr. Eri's two fingered grip. He tiptoed forward, stopping behind the foremast within a dozen feet of the two sailors. As an example little Jimmy Neale would do exceedingly well. A slender, dark haired, twenty-three year old kid. A landsman who barely knew his ropes. Educated, too, or so the mate suspected. A rah-rah boy making a summer cruise to the West Indies for the adventure; a hundred and twenty pounder whose weight would not be missed on the tackles for a day or two.

"You're a damn jump-quick-and-be-sorry kid!" Hank was saying. "Officers never tell the hands nothing. It ain't customary. I've been a sailor ten years, so don't you be telling me about Mr. Eri's duties, or your rights! Maybe ye got 'em, but you got to stay on this tub a week before ye can get to 'em—meanin' ashore. So you stopper your jaw and keep out of reach of Mr. Eri's boot!"

"I won't be kicked!" Jimmy retorted.

In that he was wrong. Mr. Eri neither said a word nor gave the sailor a chance to rise. He made three running steps and drove the toe of his heavy sea boot against the base of Jimmy's spine.

With a gasp of agony Jimmy slid across the deck into the bulwark. Pain made the sky whirl around him. He caught a rope and hauled himself to his feet, wondering dizzily what had struck him.

"It's me, you sea lawyer," said Mr. Eri softly.

His right arm swept up and down; the sandbag thudded against Jimmy's left shoulder, a calculated blow that numbed his arm and side but left his head clear to endure more pain. As he stagged back, Mr. Eri kicked him.

"Don't kill him, sir!" Hank cried warningly.

The mate turned with the canvas fist dangling from his maimed hand.

"Git forward, you," he said. "Or I'll dress you down too!"

Hank clenched his fists, but he knew too well what the end would be if he interfered. Jimmy would not be spared one blow. There would only be two men groaning on the deck instead of one when the mate finished.

"Don't get up, Jimmy!" he groaned,

and stepped aside into the darkness of the bow.

THOUGH Jimmy heard, he was already half way to his feet. He was nauseated and numb. Dimly he could make out the mate, waiting to kick him again. If he fell again he would not be able to rise. He knew it. He was being manhandled. The mate would not knock him out soon; would not cripple him permanently. He would just be kicked into groaning pulp.

The rope by which Jimmy was raising himself ended in a belaying pin. In desperation he pulled it clear, brought it crashing down on the mate's head. Mr. Eri dropped like a pole-axed ox. Jimmy crumpled to the deck beside him. He was too weak to stand. He wanted to sink restfully into the darkness that still revolved around him, but Hank was shaking him vigorously by the shoulder.

"Come out of it. Come out of it, Jimmy," the big sailor whispered. "Jees, ye've done it now, kid! The mate ain't more than livin'! Ye've laid his head open six inches. He's bleedin' like a stuck pig. Jees, come away!"

"He saw me," Jimmy pointed out.

"I'll say I done it!" The big sailor's teeth chattered with excitement. "It's mutiny, kid!" he gasped in an awed whisper. "He'll dress ye down every day till he gets ye to port, then jail ye. Five years, anyway. Assaulting an officer's most as bad as murder."

"He kicked me," said Jimmy obstinately, but Hank only shook him more vigorously.

"That won't do ye no good," he whispered fiercely. "You're educated! Think, kid! Think like hell, 'cause ye've only got a minute. Cap'n Slocum will be up—we can't kill the mate!"

On the horizon the flat rumble of thunder was more distinct. Occasionally a distant lightning flash flickered over the glassy sea. There was a breath astir on the water. As yet, more a promise than a breeze, it fluttered the sails of the *Jessie Snow* without filling them."

"Of course not," said Jimmy.

His strength was returning, and with it a realization of the seriousness of his predicament. He was thinking hard—hard as a murderer thinks who stands above a corpse; harder, for if Jimmy's crime were less, his punishment would be more prompt and certain.

"They've bet a thousand," he whispered. "They won't let anything interfere with winning that. Tell them—tell them I fell overboard and drowned."

"What?"

"I'll swim to the other schooner, you fool, before the wind comes!" Jimmy whispered tensely. "She won't bring me back, or wait for Slocum, and she'll be in Bangor first."

"But you will drown," said Hank, who had all the old shellback's terror of the water, and could not swim a stroke.

Jimmy climbed the rail, and with the least possible splash let himself drop into the sea. Nevertheless, the helmsman heard the sound.

"Man overboard!" he shouted. "Hey, on the focsle there! There's a man over side!"

"Man overboard!" Hank shouted.

Running to the rail he cast a rope's end at Jimmy.

"Come back!" he whispered. "It's too far, and you'll lose your way in the dark!"

But Jimmy was swimming away from the schooner. He could see the running lights, like faint dots far ahead over the water. He was barefoot. He kicked off his trousers, rippled loose his cotton undershirt. What was a half mile? He had swum five times as far.

Never with a left arm too numb to obey his will, however. Never against time, for a cat's paw rippled across the sea and the green light drew away, to come to rest again as the first breath of the storm passed. Lightning flickered across the water, and from the *Jessie Snow* resounded Captain Slocum's triumphant bellow:

"There he is—swimmin' off! Man the dory, you sodgers, and get that mutineer before we lose the breeze!"

Lanterns bobbed along the schooner's deck. Boatfalls creaked, and in a moment, oarlocks thumped. A dim circle of lantern light moved from the vessel in Jimmy's direction. Hank held the lantern. In panic, because he could swim no faster, Jimmy hoped his shipmate would have the wit to keep his mouth shut. The dory was not headed exactly toward him; he still had a slim chance.

"Jimmy, sing out!" Hank shouted. "The wind is coming, Jimmy. For God's sake, can't ye sing out?"

The sea remained glassy still. Jimmy turned on his back and floated as the dory drew near. It passed within thirty feet of him. He saw Hank peering anxiously into the darkness; Captain Slocum's narrow shoulders, bushy eyebrows, the beard cropped close to the square angles of the skipper's jaw.

"Damn the pup if he loses me the breeze," the captain said.

"I seen him swimmin', sir," cried the man at the oars, and Slocum added bitterly:

"So did I. Make him sing out, Hank."

Underestimating the swimmer's strength, the dory turned back. Choppy waves, higher every second, broke against Jimmy's face. The green light, which was his goal, began to draw away, and realizing that his chance for escape was gone, Jimmy swam toward the dory.

The distance was greater than he had supposed. Before he had covered half of it, the *Jessie Snow* loomed above him; slid by, passing the dory also, before she heaved to. The maneuver was to save time. Instead of rowing to overtake a drifting vessel, the crew of the dory could now row to meet a schooner which was drifting down wind upon them, but Jimmy placed another interpretation upon the move. He could never overtake the dory. He was being deserted.

He shouted, raising himself in the water. The wind was against him. Captain Slocum did not hear, though a hail from the schooner reached Jimmy clear enough.

"Come along," Mr. Eri shouted angrily. "We're losing ground, Cap'n."

"Don't I know it? You heave to, mister," Slocum bellowed in equal exasperation. "But I saw him swimming . . ."

The lantern circled, moved back. Jimmy shouted with the last breath in his lungs, and in a moment, the lantern-light was in his eyes. A boathook was thrust toward him, and he was hauled, naked and shivering, into the stern sheets at Captain Slocum's feet.

"Got you!" Slocum said in a tone as cold as a breeze off an iceberg.

That was all. They rowed to the schooner, and as they approached, Jimmy did not know which he feared more—Mr. Eri, who stood at the rail with his head wrapped in a bloody bandage, or the bearded, cold eyed skipper at whose feet he crouched.

AS HE went over the side, the mate struck him in the face. Knocked to the deck, Jimmy glimpsed a sea boot drawn back for a kick. It swung at his head . . . That was all Jimmy remembered for a long, long time. The mate kicked with savage disregard of where he struck. His boot caught Jimmy on the temple.

Lantern light shining in his face brought Jimmy to, yet, before he recovered consciousness fully, he was sensible of the fact that it was not the same night. Over him was the skipper's cold eyes and cruel face. He wore oilskins that glistened with rain. Jimmy was in his own bunk, but despite two blankets he was cold; the schooner was running before a gale that made her yaw like a crazy thing. Every timber creaked in protest against the sail she carried. The seams of the forecastle planking were leaking under the strain of such driving. Hank, who was holding the lantern for the skipper, displayed a black eye not less than two days old. The swelling had subsided, and the skin had turned a greenish black.

"Where are we?" Jimmy asked.

"In the Gulf of Maine," the skipper answered coldly. "Six hours sail from the Penobscot by dead reckoning. You've been unconscious three days, otherwise I'd have put you in irons."

He cleared his throat and produced the ship's log.

"When we reach port you will be prosecuted for assault on Mr. Eri. The penalty is not more than two years," he said. "According to section 4597, of the Revised Statutes, I must read you the entry in the ship's log, signed by myself and Mr. Eri, upon which the charge is based. This entry is legal evidence. Any reply you wish to make will be entered and signed by myself and Hank. Do you understand?"

"Do you mean that log's all you'll need? You won't require witnesses in court?" asked Jim, dismayed by the prospect of two years' imprisonment.

"Exactly," said Slocum. He began to read:

> August 10th, 9:35 P.M., James Neale, ordinary seaman, refused to obey orders and struck J. S. Eri, first mate, over the head with a belaying pin, making a three inch scalp wound. Neale then jumped overboard and attempted to desert to a passing schooner."

"He kicked me," Jimmy interrupted.

Slocum read on imperturbably:

> "When Neale was picked up—as he climbed the rail—he was knocked down and kicked in the head by J. S. Eri, first mate. The master reprimanded Eri and suspended him from duty for twenty-four hours."

The captain closed the logbook.

"He gets twenty-four hours and I two years!"

"Mr. Eri had considerable provocation," said Slocum. "I punished him, though he was needed badly on deck. Have you anything else to say?"

"Believe me I have!" Jimmy sat erect in his bunk. "I didn't refuse duty, and before I hit Mr. Eri he kicked me—before I hit him, sir!"

The skipper shrugged.

"Sailors invariably make some such charge. I'd advise you to withdraw it."

"It's true," Hank interposed feebly.

"Crews invariably stand together against their officers," the skipper answered with chill finality. "However, I'll make the entry—not that it'll do you any good, young man. Why should Mr. Eri kick you?"

Jimmy probed the bearded face, trying to read in eyes as chill, as expressionless as a winter sea, some clue to the thoughts behind them. He could not be sure whether or not the skipper and the mate were in collusion. Hank, over the captain's shoulder, shook his head.

"Well, he did," said Jimmy hopelessly.

Slocum rose and closed the logbook.

"I shall produce this in court," he remarked. "You'll find infractions of discipline at sea a serious matter."

"There's discipline for officers, too," Jimmy snapped, disregarding Hank's warning. The captain, however, took no offense.

"That is true—so Mr. Eri'll find when I write his discharge," he declared, going out. Hank lingered.

"Jees, I was scared you'd rile him," the big sailor whispered. "He'd ordered ye up on deck, an' Eri'd have killed ye. Look what he done to me when it was dark and no one to see. We're all catching hell."

"He's a case hardened old goat, though he seems on the level," said Jimmy doubtfully. "Do you think they can convict me—like that?"

"With a logbook in court? Right they can," said Hank. "On the level? I don't know. We think he's crazy. He's cracked on sail like a Banks fisherman, and he's standing into the Maine Coast hell bent. It's darker than a pocket with the rain. He ain't had a sight, but he swears he'll beat that schooner . . ."

Hank wiped the sweat off his face.

"You keep out of their way, Jimmy," he resumed in the same tense, excited whisper. "Even if you can get up—"

"Guess I can."

"Don't. We lost an hour while the skipper and Eri were jawing. The skipper blames you for putting him behind, and

Eri blames you for getting him in dutch. That bucko can do anything on deck a night like this. He damn' near has, and Slocum just walks up and down the poop, not hearin' nothin', not seein' nothin', just watching the booms bend an' darin' anybody to ease a sheet. Right on the coast we're sailin', with a gale behind us, and it too thick to see a lighthouse before our bowsprit stabs it. And the skipper just heaves the lead and fusses with the patent log! This ain't a sandy coast where the lead will tell ye where ye are. It's rock—all of it."

"If I could get that logbook," Jimmy muttered.

"No more of your landsman's tricks," Hank snapped. "There's worse things than jail, Jimmy. *They* don't sink. I'd take six months in one right now and call it luck—to get out of this tub." He started out.

"Two years is different," Jimmy called after him, but the sailor only shook his head and skipped up the ladder to the deck.

All hands had been called topside, and in the dimly lighted, triangular forecastle, the chaotic play of the sea against the hull fell upon Jimmy's ears doubly loud. He was nervous—about himself, about the schooner; stolid Hank was no alarmist.

Jimmy was weak, but he found himself able to get up, and he started immediately to dress. He would have faced Mr. Eri in the dark rather than remain alone any longer below, with the shadows cast by the lantern dancing around the walls. Nor could he get the idea of the logbook out of his mind. If every one were occupied with the ship, he might be able to get possession of it. That logs are kept in duplicate, and the fair copy usually guarded under lock and key, Jimmy did not realize.

WIND driven rain was falling with a fury that made him catch his breath when he crept on deck. Blackness of night and rain was all around the schooner. Sailors huddled by the sheets ready to let go. No one forward paid any attention to Jimmy, creeping aft in the shelter of the bulwarks; nor had the officers more leisure to observe him when he reached the poop.

Slocum and Eri clung to the mizzen shrouds, and though Jimmy bellied along the deck a yard from their boots, they kept staring into the ink black smother to leeward.

"We ought to heave to," Mr. Eri said.

"We'd ought to have hove to at dark. Don't be tellin' me my duty," Slocum answered. "I'm going to get to Bangor first. If I could just see Monhegan Light, or Manticus—"

"Wouldn't see them a hundred yards. It's four days since we had an observation," said the mate grimly. "I'm trusting my luck, though.

The captain's forefinger stabbed the dark.

"Breakers!" he snapped. "Eri—we ain't inside the lights, among that mess of islands!"

"I heard breakers to windward, too," Eri replied quietly enough. "Guess we miscalculated and carried sail too long, Skipper. Hold hard—hard down the helm!

But the *Jessie Snow* struck.

One rending crash of splintered timber as a ledge ripped her hull apart. The deck heaved upward, its planks splintered before the crew's eyes; afterward, the breath taking fall of broken masts and a wave that swept across the decks, hurling the shattered schooner from the ledge, into the deeper water beyond.

There were no more orders. When a wooden vessel driving at twelve knots is stopped in three feet, she becomes a hulk in sixty seconds. The *Jessie Snow* was breaking up, and every sailor had but one thought—to snatch the biggest piece of wreckage he could find and fling himself over the side.

The schooner had struck the mainland itself. Fifty feet away a cliff rose darkly from the breakers foaming at its base. A man who waited would be flung on to

those rocks by the sea, and pounded by wreckage drifting ashore.

Yet in that crisis there was discipline and two cool heads. The fall of the mainmast had covered Jimmy with folds of canvas. He lost precious seconds in crawling from beneath the sail and emerged only in time to see Slocum and Eri run to the longboat, fortunately unbroken, swinging from the weather side of the doomed schooner.

No time to lose, Mr. Eri at the forward davit, Slocum aft, slashed the launching tackles through with their knives, cutting the boat adrift as the crew leaped headlong into her. She struck the water, smashed sickeningly against the schooner's side; then Hank snatched an oar and fended off.

"Jump!" Eri screamed to the skipper.

The gray bearded man shook his head.

"My papers!" he shouted back, and to Jimmy's amazement, ran back to the poop and darted below. The mate might have jumped himself. He did not, but turned, his jaw dropping at the sight of Jimmy.

"Jump, you damn' little pup! I thought you was crushed below," he shouted; but the longboat, with two men pulling at the oars, was beyond reach. The mate caught Jimmy by the collar.

"You damn' Jonah . . ."

At that instant the schooner touched the slope of the beach, and both were spilled into the lee bulwark as she canted over. Captain Slocum, just emerging from the hatch, was thrown upon them. The logbook under the skipper's arm struck Jimmy's face.

"Get ashore now, I guess!" the mate gasped.

"To what?" Slocum was as cold as ever. "Streak of sand at the foot of that cliff, but the tide's rising!"

Eri, however, was cutting away what remained of the dory, and with a shrug the skipper joined him. First, however, he coolly lifted the coil of the main topmast hallyards from its pin.

"You should have been in the longboat, Neale. But you'll be useful," he said.

The three dropped the broken dory over the rail and jumped into it. Instantly they were in the water. A wave picked them up and tossed them shoreward.

Jimmy held his breath and waited for wreckage to knock him senseless. Heels over head the wave carried him up the beach. A rock gouged his back painfully; then he was cast into the air and found himself sliding seaward with the backwash of the wave. He got to his feet, but although Slocum and Mr. Eri had also reached shore, neither had shared Jimmy's good fortune.

The mate was unconscious. His right foot was doubled sharply inward and back, probably from a bone broken just above the ankle. Though Slocum was able to stand, an arm dangled. He took the coil of rope from around his neck, drew the sodden logbook from beneath his coat, and buttoned the garment around his arm.

"Give me that book," said Jimmy.

The captain pointed to the water which already washed around their ankles with every breaker that thundered in.

"Guess you can take it," he conceded. "Guess the time you'll waste fighting me will mean Eri's finish, too. This tide's rising fast. You got to be spry to climb the cliffs and haul up us two hulks."

"Throw it away," Jimmy ordered.

"Underwriters—everybody will want to see the log," Slocum said.

"I've got to haul you up that cliff—if I can climb it—with the evidence that'll send me to prison?"

"That's orders—and discipline," Slocum said. He was resolute, yet for a second the bearded mask that was his features betrayed emotion. "The log will damn me, too," he added hoarsely. "Shows I sailed onto a lee shore, in dark and a gale, on account of a bet. The heel of discipline grinds everybody, Neale."

"You thought to bring a rope for the climbing," said Jimmy.

The captain answered with his characteristic coldness.

"My job's to think ahead, yours to obey orders. Get up that rock."

He flung the heavy coil of rope around Jimmy's neck and pointed to a crack that angled down the all but perpendicular face of granite.

"There's your toe hold," he said.

Of that fifty feet of granite, every cranny and seam remained imprinted indelibly upon Jimmy's memory—particularly a tiny bush growing in a crevice ten feet from the crest. It was an evergreen of some sort. In the darkness he could not tell just what variety it was, nor how strongly the roots might be bedded in the rain soaked earth. The whiteness of the breakers below just gave him light enough to perceive it; the needles pricked his fingers when he grasped it.

THREE days in bed had sapped his strength. A forty foot climb had left him gasping, and the heavy coil of rope around his neck kept dragging, dragging him away from the cliff. Just above the bush the crack by which he had climbed deepened. There seemed to be numerous hand and toe holds, but for a two foot stretch he would have to swing himself up by the bush.

If he got rid of the rope he thought, he could make it. Not even Slocum would know he had not dropped the coil by accident. Suppose the skipper did hear the splash and guess the reason? Had he, or Mr. Eri, ever given him a Chinaman's chance? Not they—and yet, they had not shirked in the crisis.

Before his courage should go, Jimmy grasped the bush and pulled himself upward. He felt the roots start, but before they parted his groping fingers slid into a narrow crack that afforded a perfect hand hole. He heaved himself upward, set a toe on the bush, and climbing rapidly with the last of his strength; covered the last ten feet in blind recklessness.

Even then his task was not finished. He had to find a tree and knot the rope around it; he had to find a stone to tie to the end in order that Slocum might find the rope when he lowered it; and he knew he would never be able to pull two heavy men up the ascent he had just climbed.

Yet, when he lowered the rope, Slocum solved that difficulty.

"Can you tie a stopper—like on a boat fall, Neale?" the skipper shouted. "Yes? Then you ain't gone to sea for nothing! Haul up till you tire, then clap a stopper on the rope while you rest. Eri's come to. He says he can nearly make it, climbing hand over hand."

Jimmy did not care in the least what happened to the mate. He allowed Eri to do most of the climbing, hauling him only the last fifteen feet or so when the mate's strength failed. When the bucko was stretched panting on the cliff top at Jimmy's feet, it was all the sailor could do to refrain from kicking him. That Eri's leg was broken had something to do with Jimmy's forbearance. More, perhaps, was due to the fact that he had taken off his shoes to climb the cliff.

"You're a cowardly swine," he said, and found the insult far from satisfying.

"You're a damn' lucky pup," Mr. Eri snarled, when he caught his breath. "Come on; help me hoist the skipper."

When the mate put his back against a tree and braced his sound leg on a stone, his strength made the lifting of the skipper a light task for Jimmy. He was even able to assist Slocum over the cliff edge.

"Well, you did it," the captain gasped to Jimmy. "We were knee deep in water with timbers slammin' all around us. I had to hold Mr. Eri up. Look! There's help coming now, when we don't need it much. Guess the men made shore and routed out some lobsterman."

In the distance three lanterns were moving toward the cliff, bobbing as though the men who carried them were running with all possible speed.

"We still ain't got much time," Slocum resumed swiftly. From under his coat he drew the logbook.

"I was hoping you'd drop that," said Jimmy.

"While you was climbing that cliff I was expectin' you drop a coil of rope," the skipper answered. "Every time a wave broke I figured part of the splash was made by the only thing that would get me out of there alive. You'd have dropped it sure, Neale, if you'd been a mutineer.

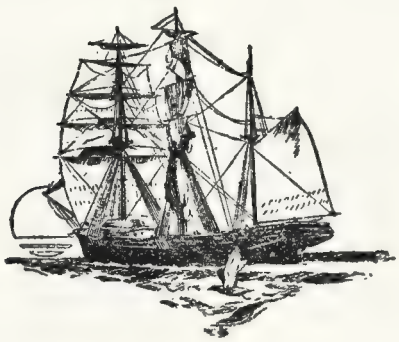
"So I guess you was tellin' the truth and Mr. Eri lied, he being too much a bucko anyhow for his own good," the skipper apologized. "Now, I always have a clip in the logbook at the current day—which is fortunate, for none of us have a match."

He opened the log, and thumbed back three pages.

"This will be the eleventh, with the account of your assault," he said, and tore the page out. "Better toss it over the cliff. Your defense—what I wrote in today about the mate kicking you without any cause—still stands. Mr. Eri's going to have some explaining to do."

"Better throw away the whole book," cried Jimmy impulsively; but though Slocum sighed, he buttoned the volume carefully into his coat.

"A skipper's got to show papers, even to his discredit, Jimmy," he declared grimly. "We both bragged about what we would or wouldn't do, so we had to pay for it. Ten years in command and never a wreck till now. It's not the statutes that enforce sea discipline, Jimmy. It's the sea."



Concluding

The RED DEVIL *from* SUN DOG

By W. C. TUTTLE

BRICK DAVIDSON, sheriff of Sun Dog County, Montana, heard his best friend, Silent Slade, sentenced to hang for the murder of Scottie McKee, with whose daughter Silent was in love. Brick set Slade free and armed with two clues—an envelope bearing the name of Jim Breen, and a tobacco sack containing marihuana weed, a Mexican drug—set out to find the real murderer.

In Sicomoro, a Border town, he learned that Breen lived just below the line and was suspected of smuggling, and that Scottie McKee was formerly a partner of his. Brick obtained employment on the Rancho del Rosa, owned by Robert Maxwell.

The day he arrived, Breen and a companion came to the rancho in Maxwell's absence and annoyed Maria, Maxwell's daughter. Brick interfered. He recognized Breen's companion as Silent Slade.

One night Brick overheard a conversation between Breen and Maxwell. He learned that the two were partners in a smuggling enterprise. A rich shipment of diamonds had disappeared with the murder of Dell Harper, Maxwell's foreman and official messenger. Breen's gang below the Border thought Maxwell had killed Harper and hijacked the cargo. They lured him to Gomez Springs, Breen's hangout. Brick rode after his employer and saved him.

In a reprisal, Gomez, Breen's lieutenant, rustled some of Maxwell's cattle. Brick again took a hand and retrieved the stock, discovering in so doing, the body of Hubert Sohmes, the diamond fence, who had come to Sicomoro to take over

A Novel *of* *Brick Davidson, Sheriff*

the diamonds. Brick was sure that Breen had murdered Sohmes for the money he knew he carried. On the body of the dead man, Brick found the unregistered mortgage Maxwell had given on his rancho in order to finance the smuggling deal.

Breen ordered Gomez to raid the Rancho del Rosa to capture Brick.

"If you don't get that damn' red head I'll kill him on sight! snarled Breen to his lieutenant. "The meddling fool!"

CHAPTER XII

SILENT WARNS THE RANCHO DEL ROSA

BRICK had been doing a lot of thinking over things that had happened since he came to the Rancho del Rosa. He spoke of them to Johnny Snow as they worked around the stable.

"Whatever became of Dell Harper's horse and saddle after he was killed?"

"We found the horse. The saddle was gone, and we decided that the animal had rolled it off. We never did find it. I remember it very well—an old black hull, Visalia tree, made in Oregon, I think. Yeah, it was a G.L. saddle, made in Portland."

Brick examined his own saddle, but found no trade mark on it.

"I'll betcha that saddle was made in Gomez Springs," said Johnny. "Old man Beeman was the saddle maker in Sicomoro, but he got into some kinda trouble a year or so ago and moved down there. It shore looks like some of his work. He makes good saddles. It was originally decorated. You can see where the ornaments was fastened on. Beeman was pretty good on silver trimmin'."

"Can he make a livin' down there?" asked Brick.

"Well, he can keep out of jail," grinned Johnny.

That afternoon Brick rode to Sicomoro and sauntered around to the sheriff's little adobe office. He found the officer alone, enjoying an old cob pipe. The little office

was almost entirely papered with old reward notices, many of them bearing the likeness of the man wanted.

"I've been wonderin' why you didn't come up and see me," said Campbell. "I see Joe Pico is walkin' around again, but he's pretty tame."

"I hope he's tame," grinned Brick. "I don't want any more trouble with him. How is everythin' goin in your business?"

"It's about the same old thing every day."

"You shore do get plenty reward notices, judgin' from your walls."

The sheriff laughed as he refilled his pipe.

"That's Ortego's idea—paperin' the walls. Yeah, we do get plenty. You see, this is sort of a clearin' house for criminals. Lots of 'em head for the Border, and they don't dare go through a regular port of entry. They hunt for the wide border, and it's shore plenty wide down here. When a new notice shows up, Ortego pastes it over an old one. Kinda keeps you up to date, you see."

Brick started to grin, but his blue eyes grew serious as his gaze shifted to a notice about midway up the wall. It was from Sun Dog County, offering five thousand dollars reward for Arthur B. Slade, dead or alive.

There was no picture, but the description was accurate. Convicted of murder in the first degree, it said.

Brick shifted his eyes and began rolling a cigaret.

"The first day I saw you, you asked me about Jim Breen," said the sheriff. "Didja ever meet him?"

"Yeah, I saw him," nodded Brick. "Quite a character. He'd be a good man for you to stand in with, it seems to me. Down there in his town, he ought to be able to keep cases on a lot of men."

The sheriff squinted one eye and looked sideways at Brick.

"He didn't tell you that, did he?"

"No-o-o. I was just thinkin' he could."

"He could—but he hasn't. He used to come in here and look over the reward notices once in a while."

The sheriff laughed softly as he lighted a match with a snap of his thumb nail.

"He shore overlooked one bet a few days ago—lost a nice piece of change for himself. See that notice up there—about the middle of the wall, the one from up in Montana? The man rode in here with Breen one day. I'd bet ten dollars against one that he's the man. Ortego had pasted the notice before I had seen it.

"This feller was so darned big that I got to thinkin' him over after he was gone, and about that time I saw this new notice. Breen jist lost five thousand. Dead or alive, that's how bad they want him."

"And Breen didn't bring him back again, eh?"

"I haven't even seen Breen since that day."

"And you can't go to Mexico and get a man."

"Well," smiled the sheriff, "I never have. It seems to me that there's a law against such a thing. How's everythin' at Maxwell's place?"

"All right."

"Somebody was tellin' me that a Miss McKee is out there. I wonder if she's any relation to Scotty McKee, who used to live here?"

"She's a nice lookin' girl."

The sheriff got up from his chair, plucked a straw from a broom in the corner, and began cleaning the stem of his pipe. When he sat down again and relighted his pipe, Brick drew a chair in close to the desk.

"You've known Breen a long time, Sheriff?" he asked.

"Quite a few years—yes."

"Why did Scotty McKee leave here suddenly?"

The sheriff looked curiously at Brick, wondering what this red headed cowboy was driving at.

"I dunno," he replied.

"You do know that he left here suddenly, don't you?"

"I know he did. In fact, he never told anybody goodby."

"Have you ever known Breen to take a

trip north? Mebbe gone for a couple weeks, or longer?"

"No, I can't say that I have. Sometimes there's a month or more that I don't even see him. He's runnin' a business down in Gomez Springs, you know."

"Yeah, I know that. Was him and Scotty McKee good friends?"

"I can't answer that. They knew each other. But what is the idea of all these questions, Davidson?"

Brick rolled another cigaret. His jaw tightened a little as he debated things. Campbell struck him as being a square shooter, an efficient officer in a land where efficient men were needed.

"That notice you spoke about up there," said Brick softly, "is for the man who was convicted of the murder of Scotty McKee."

"The murder of Scotty McKee? Why, I never heard— Wait a minute."

The sheriff closed the door and came back to his desk.

"I want to get this straight," he said. "I liked Scotty."

"I liked him too," said Brick slowly. "You see, I was the sheriff of Sun Dog, where Scotty was murdered. They convicted Slade of the murder, and I turned him loose."

"My God." The sheriff gaped at Brick. "Wasn't that a funny thing for a sheriff to do?"

"I was a funny sheriff, I reckon."

AND THEN Brick started at the beginning and told the sheriff what had happened from the time Scotty McKee bought the ranch in Sun Dog, until he—Brick—resigned his office and came South. It took at least a half hour for Brick to tell his story. The sheriff filled his pipe and smoked for a while

"I dunno," he said after a long silence. "I kinda figure that your conscience is the best judge. If your conscience says you've done the right thing, it's right. You didn't believe Slade killed McKee. I can see your argument. I'm gettin' to the age where I can set down and look at the other feller's angle on things.

"Davidson, I believe in right and wrong. Don't mistake me in that. But the law can be just as wrong as the individual. Judges and juries can be wrong, and when twelve men are wrong, it's jist too bad. This man Slade was your best friend, you say. If he had been your enemy, would you have believed him innocent? Look at that angle."

"Where did the letters addressed to Jim Breen, and the sack of marihuana come from?"

"Do you think Breen is a murderer?" countered the sheriff.

"I know damn' well he is. No, I can't tell you how I know. You've got to prove a thing like that—and I can't prove it."

"You know he killed Scotty McKee?"

"No, I don't know that."

The sheriff lighted his pipe again. This red headed cowboy had him puzzled. Whom did he think Breen had murdered, he wondered.

"Do you think Breen murdered Dell Harper, the man you found?"

"I don't believe he did, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"He came to the Rancho del Rosa after I got there that day, and Slade was with him. I don't believe Slade would have been a party to any murder. Of course, Breen might have been alone earlier in the day."

"Well, whom do you think he murdered?"

"I can't tell you right now, Campbell."

The sheriff grunted softly and looked up at the reward notice.

"Any time you need my help, don't forget to ask," he said. "You know Berry and Mitchell, the Border patrol; they'll help you. I've got nothin' on Breen. He can go back and forth across the Border—but I'll keep an eye on him.

"He used to come down here quite often and talk with me. Seemed to be interested in reward notices. I suppose he kept sort of a check on those who came down in his country. Once in a while he'd

tell me about some of 'em. It was handy information for me."

"Handy for him too, I reckon," smiled Brick.

THE SHERIFF did not question Brick any further. He had long had a suspicion that Breen was mixed up in smuggling deals, but it was nothing more than a suspicion.

Brick went from the sheriff's office to the One Oak *cantina*. He had not been there since the day he won the horse and saddle from Joe Pico, and he wondered what kind of a reception he would get.

There were several men in the place, and among them was Edward Pico. He gave Brick a cordial greeting and invited him to have a drink. It rather surprised Brick, but he accepted.

"Never refuse the good will of the devil," he told himself.

"My brother is around again," he told Brick as they filled their glasses, "but he bears no grudge."

"Well that's fine," smiled Brick. "Sorry it happened. I'd rather be his friend than his enemy."

"*Buena.* It was unfortunate. Joe is high strung. And the two Abelardo brothers—they will annoy you no more. It was without my consent or knowledge that they went to the Rancho del Rosa that night."

Brick smiled over his drink but said nothing. He did not know whether Ed Pico was sincere, or whether he wanted to be sure that Brick had a hand in swinging Al and Bill from the oak limb that night.

"Everythin' is all right," he said, "and here's hopin' that it keeps on bein' right."

"That is very certain, my friend. I admire Roberto Maxwell, who is my old friend, although we have seen little of each other lately."

Brick was fairly sure that Ed Pico was the leader of the hijackers, and he wondered if Pico had any suspicions that Maxwell had ever been mixed up in a smuggling proposition. He decided that Pico was far from being a fool, and that no doubt he had spies in Gomez Springs. It was a game that required inside information ahead of time. He wondered how many spies Breen had in Sicomoro. Some, no doubt.

"You bought this *cantina* from Scotty McKee, didn't you?" asked Brick.

"Yes. Did you know him?"

"I knew him up in Montana."

"Yes? Montana, eh? He went a long way from here."

"Was he in trouble when he left here?"

Pico looked sharply at Brick, who was looking directly at him. The Mexican shrugged his shoulders, smiling thinly.

"Who knows? A man's business is his own in this country. We do not ask a man if he is in trouble—that is his own affair."

"I reckon I asked a foolish question."

"One that only McKee could answer truthfully."

"Then it won't never be answered—McKee was murdered up in Montana several months ago."

"No?" Pico's surprise was genuine. "Murdered? By whom?"

Brick shook his head and motioned for the bartender to set out the bottle again.

"That is bad news," sighed Pico. "I liked Scotty McKee, although we were—" Pico stopped to fill his glass.

"You were not friends?" queried Brick.

"Friends—yes. Perhaps we differed in our views. And now he is dead. That is bad." He lifted his glass.

"*Mil afectos de mi parte.* You do not understand Spanish? Pardon me. My kindest regards."

They drank together and Brick left the *cantina*. He met Joe Pico on the sidewalk. Joe looked thin and wan, but his eyes were bright.

"*Buenas dias, pelo rojo,*" he said.

Brick grinned. Johnny Snow had called him *pelo rojo*—red hair.

"Glad to see you out again," nodded Brick. "Feelin' good?"

Joe nodded and went into the *cantina*. But Brick was not deceived in the least by

the pleasant manner of the Pico brothers. Brick knew that he was far from forgiven for shooting Joe, and that Joe would return the compliment at the first opportunity.

Wong Hop, fat and bland, stood in the doorway of his little adobe restaurant and watched Brick ride out of town. Many a smuggled celestial had passed through Wong Hop's hands, but business had been bad of late. Wong Kee, his cousin, was dead; Lee Duck allied with Breen. It was not strange that Wong Hop had jumped to the other side of the fence and was furnishing Ed Pico with information. A man must live.

LEE DUCK was rather disgusted with Jim Breen. Lee had lost a lot of money in the diamond fiasco, and he was not at all satisfied. Perhaps he talked too much to Louie Yen, a Chinese herb doctor, who was a good friend to Wong Hop. At any rate, Wong Hop had certain information which might contain a grain of truth, and he explained it all to Ed Pico, who came to eat fried rice every day.

"You say they think Breen got the diamonds himself, Wong?" queried Pico in Spanish, which Wong spoke like a native.

"It sounds reasonable. Who else? And something has happened to Sohmes, the man from the North who disposes of the stones. Sohmes came here, hired a horse and buggy and went to Gomez Springs. He sent the driver back with the vehicle, deciding to ride with Breen to his ranch. Lee Duck saw them go. Breen says that Sohmes did not go to the rancho, but that he came back here.

"No one saw him come back, and there is only one road. Lee Duck says Sohmes did not know the diamonds were missing. If he came down here to secure the diamonds, he carried thousands of dollars with him. The man was fat, unused to a saddle, and it does not stand to reason that he would go North on a horse, sneaking past Sicomoro, because he had nothing to conceal. Lee Duck thinks Breen had the diamonds all the time; that Breen conspired to get Wong Kee murdered, so that no man would know how the diamonds were sent. I do not know the truth, but that is as Louie Yen told it to me."

"You think Breen killed Sohmes for his money?"

"Perhaps. I do know that Breen is offering Gomez a reward for the red head who works at the Rancho del Rosa."

Pico grinned widely.

"What has he done to Breen?"

"Who knows? Perhaps it is because of Maxwell's daughter. It was said that she would wed Breen very soon. Breen has been keeping away from the Rancho del Rosa since the red head came."

"I haven't the heart to interfere," grinned Pico. "But I would like to get my hands on Breen. Where would he keep the diamonds?"

"He spends much time at his rancho, they say. You have been there?"

"I know it well. Perhaps—"

"He keeps five men at the rancho, but it is evident that they have little stomach for fighting his battles. Just now they are all living in town."

"Why?"

"Perhaps Breen is keeping them amused while he and that braggart of a Gomez stay at the rancho and plan their devilment. Breen is drinking heavily, and Gomez will keep pace with him."

Pico thanked Wong for the information and went back to talk it over with Joe.

BRICK wondered if he had done right in making a confidant of the sheriff. Campbell seemed very human, but it was really the reward notice that caused Brick to tell the story. He felt that if the sheriff understood his angle of the matter, he would give Silent more consideration in case the big cowboy came across the Border.

Juanita told Brick that night she would be going back to Montana in a few days. She had tried to induce Marie to go back

with her, but with no success. Brick tried to plan some way in which Silent could get a few words with Juanita, but it did not seem possible. Silent could not take a chance on crossing the line, and Mexico, just at that point, was no place for Juanita.

"You'll come back to Sun Dog some day," Juanita told him.

"I don't think so. There's nothin' in Sun Dog for me. I couldn't even get a job at forty a month in Sun Dog."

"Soapy Caswell would hire you, Brick."

"Out of pity, he might. Good old Soapy. No, I'll stay down here. There's a lot of cow country down along this Border. Are you goin' to run the ranch when you go back?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, you'll prob'ly marry some Sun Dog cattleman."

"Brick."

"I'm sorry."

"Silent will come back some day."

"I wish I had your confidence."

A big yellow moon was shining over the patio wall, flooding the flagged paths with light. Over in the bunkhouse, Johnny Snow was strumming "La Paloma", while a mocking bird in the roses called in a sleepy voice. The old Mexican woman in the kitchen was singing softly over her work.

"I think I am afraid of this country," said Juanita.

"Afraid of what?"

"Oh, I don't know. I have always had the feeling that something will happen. Nothing has, of course. I suppose I am foolish. Marie laughs at me—laughs at the idea of anything out of the ordinary happening at the Rancho del Rosa. But it is lonesome, Brick. No neighbors, no other women."

"Yeah, that's true. I've noticed—" Brick stopped short.

A man had stepped in through the rose covered archway and had stopped just inside the patio. His shadow looked big and grotesque against the old patio wall.

Brick got slowly to his feet, scraping his boot against the worn tile of the steps. The man swung around and came toward them. They were standing in the full light of the moon, and he stopped a few steps away, staring at them.

"Juanita?" he said hoarsely. "You—it can't be you?"

It was Silent Slade.

"Hello, pardner," said Brick softly, but Silent ignored him. Juanita was leaning forward, her eyes wide in the moonlight.

"Silent," she said, whispering his name. "Where in the world?"

And then he took her in his arms, mumbling to himself. He was clean shaved, and looked like the old Silent Slade, as he held out his hand to Brick.

"I had to come," he said simply. "They're framin' to get you, pardner. I I had to pack a warnin'."

"Who?" asked Brick.

"Breen and Gomez. I'm part of Breen's gang. You've got him scared, and he's goin' to try and bush you."

"When?"

"*Quien sabe?*"

Silent laughed softly and turned to Juanita, who was looking at him dumbly, hardly realizing that it really was Silent Slade.

"You see, I'm learnin' *Español*, honey," he said.

"Oh, Silent, I can hardly believe my eyes. It really is you?"

"And all in one chunk. Good Lord, I'd have been here long ago if I had known you was here. Tell me about it. Brick, can't we go somewhere and talk? You know there's a reward—"

"Forget it," growled Brick. "Maxwell is a friend. The boys here are all square shooters. The sheriff—"

"Knows I'm down in Gomez Springs," laughed Silent. "Breen told me."

"Breen prob'ly told him, too."

"Shore. Breen is as crooked as a corkscrew. I know that *hombre*. Me and him almost had a run-in the other night. He's pretty close mouthed, but I found out that him and Gomez want to get you. His men are all in Gomez Springs, drunk most of the time."

"Do any of 'em know you came?"

"Kelsey does. He was almost sober. I reckon Breen gave him orders to see that none of us got our horses from the stable, but I got mine. I told Kelsey I was comin' across the line. He asked me the other day if I knew you. I reckon it was because I told Breen to lay off you, or get his hands ready to handle a harp."

THE BUNKHOUSE door slammed and Johnny Snow came across the patio, humming a tune. He came up to the group and Brick introduced him to Silent. In a few words he told Johnny who Silent was and why he was there.

"That's great," said Johnny. "But the warnin' is old stuff, Slade. Me and Brick knowed that Breen was after us. You see, we took back them six beeves that Gomez and his gang ran across the Border."

Silent had not heard about that, because he and the other boys left that same morning. It made him laugh.

"I'd like to have heard Breen when he found it out. And that danged chink can talk both English and Spanish. He shore could deliver your message."

"We was sure of that. Where's your horse?"

"Just outside the patio."

"I'll bring him in, Slade. You never know when you might need a horse real quick."

"He's one of our own kind," said Brick, as Johnny went after the horse. "The kid has shore got the stuff."

Marie heard them talking and came out on the porch. She was almost as surprised as Juanita when she was introduced to Silent. They were all trying to talk at once when Johnny came back with the horse. He dropped the reins near the steps and walked around on the moonlit side of the animal, examining the saddle. Finally he came back to them.

"Slade," he said softly, "where did you get that saddle?"

"I suppose it belongs to Breen."

"What about it?" asked Brick quickly.

"That was Dell Harper's saddle. I'd know it anywhere."

Brick walked out and looked it over. It was as Johnny had described it to him —an old black leather saddle, Visalia tree, made by the G.L. people, Portland, Oregon.

"Can you find out where Breen got it?" asked Johnny.

"Well, I shore can try it," replied Silent. "Some of the boys might know about it. Breen furnishes horses and ridin' rigs."

"How long can you stay?" asked Juanita, who was more interested in that than in the saddle.

"You shore don't have to run," said Johnny. "Won't nobody know you're here, Slade."

Marie took Brick by the arm and squeezed it softly, as she whispered:

"Bring Johnny in the house. Can't you see they want to be alone?"

"Look out," warned Johnny.

A man was riding through the archway. Johnny stepped in against Silent, shoving him back into the deep foliage, which screened the porch.

"Get down," he hissed, and then aloud— "Well, I better put that horse away." He walked out to the animal.

The rider dismounted near the steps. It was Campbell, the sheriff. He paid no attention to Johnny and the horse, but came up to the three people on the steps.

"Hello, folks," he said pleasantly.

The girls were tongue tied.

"Oh, hello, Sheriff," said Brick. "Had your back to the moon and I didn't recognize you. How are you?"

"Finer'n frog hair."

He stopped on the lower step and wiped his face with a handkerchief.

"Just ridin' around and stopped to say howdy. Is Maxwell at home?"

"Ye—yes, he is in the house," stammered Marie. "I'll go in with you."

"Thank you kindly. Kinda warm this evenin', ain't it."

"Sultry," said Brick. "Might storm."

"Shore might. I'll see you later."

Marie took him into the house and

closed the door. Silent got to his feet, took a deep breath and holstered his gun. He had been ready.

"Me for room enough to turn around in," he said softly. "Every rose has its thorns, and these back in that bush has plenty."

"You and Juanita go out the back gate," said Brick. "That'll give you a getaway. When you hear me whistle like I was callin' a dog—you hit the grit."

Silent took his horse and went cautiously across the patio with Juanita, while Brick and Johnny sat down on the steps.

"Gosh, what a close call," said Johnny. "It's a darned good thing Campbell wasn't lookin' for Slade."

"I'd tell a man," grinned Brick. "Good for both of 'em. I don't think Silent Slade would ever give up without a scrap."

"What do you reckon he wants to see Maxwell for? It ain't often that he comes here."

"I dunno."

THEY SAT there in the moonlight, smoking and listening to the night birds. Just inside the main room they could hear the sheriff talking with Marie and her father, and a few minutes later the girl came out with the officer.

Brick heard them coming and whistled sharply several times. They came to the steps and the sheriff put on his big hat.

"Could I speak privately to you for a minute, Davidson?" he asked.

"Why, shore," replied Brick, wondering what the sheriff had on his mind. They walked out to Campbell's horse, and the sheriff lowered his voice as he said—

"Breen came to Sicomoro tonight. He told me that I'd find Slade here."

"Yea—?"

"I didn't find him here. Breen must have been mistaken."

"Must have been," said Brick slowly.

"I dunno why Breen told me this."

"I dunno, Sheriff."

"I reckon Slade has been workin' for Breen."

"That might be true."

"Uh-huh. And Slade ought to know that Breen tried to turn him in. But I don't reckon there'll be any chance to tell him—not since you whistled to the dog. You see, I happen to know that there never has been a dog on this rancho."

The sheriff slowly mounted his horse and adjusted his hat.

"Do you know if Breen is still in Sicomoro?" asked Brick.

"He was there when I left. He may wait to see me come back."

"Thank you kindly, Sheriff."

"You're welcome. Good night, folks," he called to Brick and Marie, and rode out of the patio.

Juanita had evidently been watching from the rear gate. After the sheriff rode away, she came back across the patio.

"Has he gone?" asked Brick.

"Yes," she said softly. "He heard your signal. Oh, I'm so glad I saw him. He says he will come back again. Did the sheriff suspect anything?"

"Not a thing."

Brick turned and started for the stable, but Johnny joined him near the gate.

"What's up?" asked the boy.

"Breen is in Sicomoro. He came there to warn the sheriff that Silent came here tonight, and I'm goin' to have a showdown with Mr. Breen."

"Are you goin' to Sicomoro, Brick?"

"Right now."

"I'll go with you—he might have a friend with him."

CHAPTER XIII

THE PICOS PLAY A HUNCH

SILENT had misjudged Kelsey. The lean outlaw met Breen shortly after Silent's departure for the Rancho del Rosa, and they had a few more drinks, which caused Kelsey to talk confidentially. Perhaps Kelsey figured he owed more to Breen than he did to Slade—Kelsey was the type that make good stool pigeons. He told Breen that Slade had taken a horse and gone to Maxwell's place.

For several minutes Breen was profanely bitter. He cursed Kelsey for letting Slade have a horse and saddle, but Kelsey pointed out that Slade was nearly twice his size. He hinted that it might be better for all concerned if Slade did not know that Breen had heard of his absence.

Then Breen got the idea. He would go to Sicomoro, tell the sheriff where he could catch Slade, and thereby remove Slade from their midst. He saddled a horse and nearly ran its legs off in getting to Sicomoro. He told the sheriff, who lost no time in heading for the rancho.

Breen wanted to be sure that the sheriff captured Blade before he went back to Gomez Springs, so he sauntered around Sicomoro, killing time. He had a few drinks in a little *cantina* at the end of the main street, where he saw Al Abelardo. Breen had always detested the half breed, who left the *cantina* upon his arrival.

He came on up to another *cantina*, and met Joe Pico on the adobe walk in front of the place. Breen spoke to Joe, who merely nodded. Breen had a drink, lighted one of his own brand of cigarets, and went out, heading for the One Oak *cantina*, farther up the street.

But Jim Breen did not get that far. As he passed a narrow alley, he met a man in the dark—a man who was evidently intoxicated. The walk was narrow and they almost collided. Breen stopped short, and as he stopped, something crashed down on his head from behind, and Breen lost all interest in things.

That is, he lost interest for ten or fifteen minutes, in which time his locale was considerably changed. He awoke with a dull ache in his head and a feeling that he had been eating salt. He was lying on an old couch near a table, on which rested an oil lamp with a smoky chimney. Seated beside him was Bill Abelardo, gun in hand, while Al Abelardo sat nearby, his elbows resting on the table. Breen grunted and tried to sit up, but found that he was roped to the couch.

"Fill pretty good, eh?" grinned Al.

"What's the idea?" gritted Breen. He had little love for these two men—and they knew it.

"Theese idea ees good one," grinned Al.

"Damn' half breed," groaned Breen. "Which one of you hit me? I'll pay you back for this."

The Abelardos laughed joyfully.

"He's make pay for theese, eh?" grinned Al. "*Mucho bueno.*"

"Damn' good," chuckled Bill.

Breen heard a footstep, and turned his head to see Ed Pico coming across the room. He halted at the end of the couch and looked down at the prisoner.

"This is some of your work, eh?" gritted Breen.

Pico inhaled deeply on a cigaret, nodding slowly. His dark eyes flashed in the yellow light.

"What's the big idea?" asked Breen.

"The big idea," said Pico slowly, "is that you are tied up. I have plenty evidence that you murdered a man named Sohmes. Makes you flinch, eh? Why not? The sheriff would be glad to know what I have heard. Sohmes was a citizen of this country—and you are on the north side of the line."

Breen wet his dry lips with a dryer tongue. He wondered what this man knew. He had no wish to try to prove his innocence.

"What's your game, Pico?" he asked hoarsely. "What's the idea of knocking me on the head, roping me from head to heel and then accusing me of a murder I know nothing about. As far as I know, Sohmes is alive."

Pico laughed. He knew better. Breen's eyes shifted nervously.

"The murder is already proved," he lied coldly. "The question is this: How much is it worth to you to save your own neck?"

"Staging a holdup, eh?"

"Call it what you will."

"Damn you, what do you want? How much? I'm not a rich man but—"

"But you do not want to talk with the sheriff. Is that it? They hang men for murder down here."

Breen ground his teeth and stared at

the ceiling, wondering what it was all about. He turned his eyes and looked at Pico.

"Well, go ahead and talk. You've hijacked plenty of stuff from me. We know each other. What's the price, Pico?"

"Those diamonds."

"Diamonds, eh?"

"The ones Dell Harper was supposed to bring across. Either you or one of your men killed him, I suppose. But he didn't have them, Breen. You got them from Wong Kee, and then had Wong Kee murdered. We want those diamonds, or you get a bed in jail tonight, charged with the murder of Sohmes."

BREEN blinked thoughtfully. He had the mind of a fox, and now he could see a way out. He would outwit these slow thinkers.

"You have searched me?" he asked.

Pico nodded coldly.

"We didn't expect you to carry them, Breen."

Breen laughed softly in spite of his aching head.

"No doubt you will let me go and get them for you."

"Exactly—but not alone. They are in Gomez Springs?"

"No."

"At your rancho?"

Breen shut his lips tightly, refusing to answer.

"How many men have you at the rancho?"

"My men are all in Gomez Springs. But that does you no good. None of them know where the stuff is hidden, and I'll see you damned before I tell. You haven't any evidence against me, Pico. Your bluff is no good."

Ed Pico smiled and rolled a fresh cigaret.

"You call it bluff, eh?" he mused. "Perhaps it is. All I have is the word of other men. They are willing to testify. It seems that they have no friendship for you, and would like to see you hang. I do not consider your life worth one-tenth of the diamonds—but possibly you have a different idea of values. The owner of a life usually does value it more than any one else would. But that is final, Breen. You take us to the diamonds, hand them over to us, and you go free. A crooked move, and we kill you on the spot. Consider all this, and give me your answer."

"Suppose I split the diamonds with you, Pico?"

"Would you split if you were in my place? Yes? You liar. You'd take them all and slit my throat in the bargain. Perhaps you'll save your throat—it all depends. You see, I have never murdered a man—yet."

Breen shut his eyes and for several minutes there was no word spoken. His head seemed filled with trip hammers, but it did not affect the functioning of his crooked brain. Finally he opened his eyes.

"It's nothing but a damn' holdup," he said wearily. "But what can I do? Take these ropes off and I'll take you to the diamonds."

Pico laughed at Breen.

"Take off what ropes? You fool, did you think we would turn you loose? You'll take us to the diamonds all right, but you'll be roped all the time. I'd trust you about as far as I'd trust a snake."

Al and Bill unroped him from the couch, but immediately bound his arms tightly to his body and took a half hitch around his neck. They found Joe Pico outside with the five horses, and they immediately tied Breen to the saddle. Al Abelardo fastened the lead rope to his saddle horn and they headed for the Border. They had held Breen in the Pico home in Sicomoro.

Breen was no fool, and he thought he had deceived Ed Pico. He knew that Lobo Gomez would have a guard out at the rancho who would hear them coming. Unless the newcomers announced who they were, Gomez was to take it for granted that they were enemies, and act accordingly. Breen's only chance of fail-

ure would be that Gomez might show a light at the rancho, which would cause his captors to exercise undue caution; or that the guard might have imbibed too much tequila. Ed Pico led the way. He knew where to hit the old dry wash and cut the trail to the rancho. He had been there many times. All four men were armed with rifles, in addition to their revolvers, but Breen was not afraid. Lobo Gomez had just cause to hate the Pico and Abelardo families, and he wondered just what the big bandit would do to them. It would be plenty, he knew.

BRICK and Johnny arrived at Sicomoro just after the sheriff got there, but they did not find Jim Breen. They searched all the *cantinas* and went through all the stores, but they did not catch sight of the dapper personage they sought.

Later they came back to the sheriff's office and sat with him for a while. He had not seen Breen, and he confessed that it seemed queer. He was sure that Breen would wait to see if Slade were captured. He did not ask them why they followed him to Sicomoro, because he knew they would not tell him. Besides, it was none of his business.

They drifted back along the street, keeping their eyes open, listening to the conversation in the stores and *cantinas*, which netted them nothing.

"It's kinda funny we ain't seen none of the Pico outfit," declared Johnny. "You usually see some of them around here."

"The less I see of that outfit the better I like it, Johnny."

"Me too; only I thought it was kinda queer."

Johnny casually inquired of the bartender in the One Oak if Pico was around, but the bartender did not know.

"He was here a while ago," he said. "Come in pretty soon, I guess."

But Pico did not come. They played roulette for a while, then made another circuit of the town, finally coming back to their horses.

"Well, that son of a gun got away," said Brick wearily. "I shore did hanker to meet him. I was goin' to knock his nose so far around on his face that he'd have to turn his back to a rose to smell it."

"He's shore got somethin' comin'," laughed Johnny. "I shore hope I'm in sight when it happens."

They mounted and rode back to the rancho. Thunder heads had come up from the west and obscured the moon. Heat lightning played along the distant hills, and the air was oppressive.

"We're due for a storm," said Johnny. "Don't get much rain this time of the year, but all this heat is shore to stir up somethin'."

They rode slowly along the dusty road. It was too sultry to think of sleeping, so they were in no hurry. It was quite dark when they reached the rancho and put up their horses. Brick lighted a lantern in the stable, noting that it was nearly twelve o'clock by his watch.

"Everybody's gone to bed, I guess," said Johnny. "Slim will jist about wake up and howl like a wolf. I never did see a man who hated to wake up as bad as Slim."

"Maybe we better take the lantern," grinned Brick. "Save us from fallin' over a chair when we try to find the lamp."

"Good idea. C'mon."

They went through the rear arch and into the patio, the lantern casting grotesque shadows as they moved in the direction of the bunkhouse. Suddenly Brick jerked to a stop. Johnny bumped into him and dropped the lantern, which was immediately extinguished, leaving them in darkness.

It came again, that queer noise, which Brick had heard.

"F'r God's sake," grunted Johnny. "What's that, Brick?"

It was a hollow groan, just ahead of them in the darkness. Brick ripped a match along the leg of his overalls, cupping the light in his palms.

"Get the lantern, Johnny," he blurted. "It's Slim. Hold it still. I can't light it on the fly, can I?"

Brick finally managed to light the lamp. Slim Neeley, his face clotted with blood and his hair matted, was at their feet. Brick handed the lantern to Johnny. He picked Slim up and kicked the bunkhouse door open ahead of him. He placed Slim in a bunk, where the foreman of the Rancho del Rosa proceeded to sag back in a faint.

Brick grabbed the lantern and went running to the house, Johnny at his heels. The back door was wide open and they went in on the run. The Mexican-Indian cook was roped to a chair, tightly gagged with an old apron.

Brick quickly took away the gag and the ropes, questioning her, shaking her by the shoulder, but she merely looked blankly at them, working her mouth foolishly.

"Gag was too tight; she can't speak," panted Johnny, as he lighted a lamp on the table.

Brick was half way up the stairs before Johnny got the lamp lighted. Everything was in confusion up there. The rooms had been turned upside down, the furniture smashed. Brick ran down to Johnny, his face white in the yellow light.

"Nobody up there?" whispered Johnny. Brick shook his head. He braced himself against the table, and looked at the old woman.

"She can't talk," said Johnny. "Never could talk much. Let's see if Slim knows anythin'."

They went back to the bunkhouse, where Brick poured water on Slim's head. The shock brought Slim back to consciousness. He had been hit over the head pretty hard. Brick gave him a drink of water and his eyes gradually assumed a normal expression.

"Remember what happened, Slim?" asked Brick.

Slim blinked thoughtfully and his hand sought his head. He seemed to have difficulty in figuring out what was the matter. He frowned up at the two boys, sighed deeply, and looked at his hands.

"Don'tcha remember anythin', Slim?" pleaded Johnny.

"Have I been sick?" he asked weakly. "I—I don't remember—"

"You got hurt. Don'tcha remember gettin' hurt, Slim? Somebody must have hit you over the head. Did somebody come here?"

Slim was staring at him, wide eyed. He remembered now.

"Mexicans," he said slowly. "The place was full of 'em. My God, what happened? I was in the house, and—and when I came out, they met me at the door. They had rifles. I—I remember now, tryin' to pull a gun. But I don't remember whether I pulled it or not."

"Somebody popped you on the head."

"That's funny. But what happened? Give me another drink, will you? I'm so danged thirsty, and my head hurts. What happened?"

Brick gave him a drink and he gulped thirstily.

"That's good water," said Slim wearily. "It hits the spot."

"You're lucky to have any spot to hit. And all you know is that you saw a lot of Mexicans, eh?"

"It's jist like a dream. Lot of Mexicans with rifles. Shore surprised me, I tell you. I wasn't dreamin' it, was I?"

"I reckon you wasn't," said Johnny. "There's nobody left, except you and Cook. They gagged her so tight that she can't talk."

"Everybody gone?" Slim sat up dizzily. Brick and Johnny nodded.

"A—a raid, eh? That's a hell of a note. And me knocked down—"

"They probably thought you was dead," said Brick. "You better lay down and take care of that head."

"Everythin' goes around and around—" Slim went out again.

BRICK and Johnny looked at each other. Never in Brick's life had he felt as helpless as he did at that moment. Marie, Juanita, Maxwell, Buck Eads and Leo Herrera—all missing. Where—and why?

The sound of a step in the doorway brought them about. It was only the old cook, her dirty face streaked with tears. She came in, walking painfully.

"Can you talk now, Cook?" asked Johnny.

"Talk little," she said thickly.

"What happened? You saw it all?"

"Not see much. Two *Mejicanos* come in kitchen, tie me up. Tie apron in mouth, some over face. Can't see. Hear much noise. Take me in room and tie me on chair. Hear plenty, see nothing. Marie cry."

The old woman put her hands over her face.

"Keep talkin'," said Johnny huskily. "What else didja hear?"

"Too much talk. They all go way; leave me on chair."

"Do you know who it was, Cook?" asked Brick.

"Don't know. Not see. Too many talk." She took away her hands and looked at Slim.

"He dead?"

"No, he's all right—just hit on the head. Pretty soon he'll be all right. Will you stay and take care of him?"

"I stay. Where you go now?"

"*Quien sabe?*" muttered Johnny.

"Yeah, who knows?" echoed Brick. "Let's go. Better take rifles and plenty shells, pardner. We may need 'em."

They saddled their horses and rode away from the rancho.

"No use goin' to Sicomoro," said Johnny wearily. "The officers can't do a thing. They'd eventually get a company of soldiers to camp down here, but what good does that do us?"

"I reckon it's a two handed job," said Brick. "We're a couple of danged fools to go hornin' around down in that country. I've got a red head to alibi my foolishness, but you ain't got a thing."

"You think not? My God, man, my alibi is somewhere down there right now."

"That's right. I forgot."

IT DID not take Silent long to ride back to Gomez Springs. Kelsey was not at the stable when he put up his horse, and he noticed that Breen's horse was not in its stall. Silent fed his horse, and then went around to the *cantina*. He saw Mahan standing in the doorway of a little tobacco shop across the street, so he went over to him, wondering if Breen had noted his absence.

"Got back, eh?" grunted Mahan. "You're lucky, Slade."

"Lucky—why?"

Mahan laughed shortly and drew Silent away from the door.

"Don't never trust Kelsey," he said. "He told Breen what you told him. I heard a little of it, and after Kelsey got a few more drinks, he told me the rest. Breen went to Sicomoro to tell the sheriff where to pick you up. That's why I was surprised to see you."

"Kelsey told Breen, and Breen told the sheriff, eh?"

"Sure. Damn' doublecrossers. But Breen hates that red head, and he knew you went to warn him. Watch out for Breen now. He ain't back yet."

"Mahan, I'm goin' to have to kill Breen, I suppose."

"Looks thataway. There's some things you can't dodge. It's you or him. Things are gettin' tight down here. Breen has lost his grip. Too much tequila and too many of them damned doped cigarets. Don't take a chance on him, Slade. He won't shoot square."

"And we ain't been paid yet," grinned Silent.

"Try and collect it."

"Well, I reckon I'm about to sever connections with Mr. Breen."

"I've got a little scheme, Slade. Want in on it?"

"I might be open to suggestions—if I live long enough."

"I talked with Lee Duck tonight. That chink is smart. He's sick and tired of Breen. You know what he thinks? He thinks Breen got all them diamonds. I asked him if he thought Breen had them

in his safe in the *cantina*, and he said he didn't. I'll betcha that slant eyed person has seen the inside of that safe. He thinks Breen has the diamonds cached at the rancho. If he's right, there's a lot of money that me and you might as well have."

"Sounds good," mused Silent. "But what about Lobo Gomez?"

"Let him in on it, or—"

"Would he doublecross Breen?"

"Lobo Gomez would doublecross his own mother for a lead peso. We'll go out and talk with Lobo. Let him send a man in for Breen, *sabe?* Once we get Breen out there, we'll make him talk. Lobo knows how. When the Lord made him, he forgot to stick a conscience into him. I reckon he's just as well off, so long as he keeps at his present occupation."

"Then I better keep away from Breen here in town. How about lettin' some of the boys in on the deal?"

"You're the only one I'd trust, Slade."

"Thanks. We better pull out before Breen gets back. He's prob'ly up in Sicomoro waitin' for the sheriff to lead me in on a rope. The funny part of it is that the sheriff almost got me. I'm still full of rose thorns from hidin' 'mongst 'em."

"You probably got off lucky. Let's start travelin'."

They crossed the street and went behind the *cantina*, where the horses were kept in a long adobe stable. Somebody had lighted the lantern. As they came in, Kelsey stepped out of a stall. His jaw sagged when he saw Silent, but before he could move, the big cowboy had grabbed him and deftly removed his gun from its holster.

"Damn you," snapped Kelsey, and drove his right fist against the side of Silent's neck with every ounce of power he commanded. It might have sent an ordinary man reeling, but it had no effect upon Slade.

Silent's left fist, traveling about eighteen inches, caught Kelsey flush on the chin. A slight hunch of the left shoulder, a pivot of the hips, sent the punch home with crushing power. Kelsey dropped like a poleaxed steer.

Silent said nothing. He removed Kelsey's belt and buckled it around his own waist.

"Gives me an extra gun," he said, and lifted his saddle off its peg against the wall.

"I dunno," said Mahan, as he tightened his cinch.

"Dunno what?" queried Silent.

"Dunno why you pack a gun. You don't need it."

CHAPTER XIV

BREEN'S RANCHO

THE WIND was hissing through the mesquite and sage when Breen and his four captors swung off the dry wash on the trail to the rancho. The moon had been blotted out by the clouds, and a distant rumble of thunder presaged a storm. As they drew into sight of the house, Breen breathed a sigh of relief. There was no light showing at the rancho.

But Ed Pico was no fool. He halted the cavalcade two hundred yards from the house and sent Al Abelardo ahead to reconnoiter. Breen grinned to himself. Gomez had a couple of Yaqui Indians doing guard duty, and they would probably let Al do his spying, in order to capture all of them. Breen had no doubt that the Yaquis knew of their approach.

It was fifteen minutes before Al came back and reported the place deserted. Breen almost laughed aloud as they went forward, but his laugh turned to consternation when Ed Pico and Bill Abelardo came from the house and began taking off the ropes.

"Nobody home except the Chinese cook, and he's roped to a chair," said Pico. "Climb down, Breen."

Breen dismounted slowly, his mind in a whirl, and preceded Pico into the house. The Chinese cook was tied to a chair, and Al Abelardo was building a fire in the fireplace. Breen sat down, and Bill Abelardo quickly roped him tight.

The wind blew down the old flue,

sending a shower of ashes across the hard packed adobe floor.

"A good night to be under a roof," smiled Ed Pico, rubbing his hands. He turned to Breen. "Where are the diamonds?"

Breen stared at the fire, his lips closed tightly. For once in his life he was up against a hard deal, and he did not know how to get out of it.

"Plenty of time to get the diamonds," he said slowly. "You can't go back until the storm is over."

Ed Pico laughed at him.

"No? You're wrong. Give me the diamonds, and see what I care for a little storm. You think to gain time, eh? Perhaps, if we stay here long enough, some of your men will surprise us. Is that the idea? Just rest your mind on that score, Breen. We are not going to stay long. Tell us where the diamonds are."

"Suppose," said Breen thoughtfully, "I refuse."

"We have thought of that," said Joe Pico.

He walked over to the fire and seized an old branding iron which had been placed in the flames quietly upon their arrival. It was a queer shaped Mexican brand, and would cover at least a six inch square. Breen flinched.

"It will soon be hot," said Joe. "This old iron heats quickly."

"Bluffing, eh?" grunted Breen.

"Why bluff?" asked Ed Pico. "Your hide means nothing to us."

"Suppose I don't even know where the diamonds are hidden?"

"You are supposing a lot for a man in your position."

Breen knew that Ed Pico was not bluffing. He held the whip hand, and he was going to use it. But where was Gomez? Why had he left the rancho? Had he decided to raid the Rancho del Rosa that night, or had he and his men gone to Gomez Springs? The Chinaman would know, but Breen was afraid to ask him for fear Pico might rush the issue. The Chinaman sat gazing blankly at the flames. It was immaterial to him who was in charge, so long as they did no worse than rope him to a chair.

Joe Pico tested the iron against a mesquite root, and a curl of smoke twisted upward from the contact.

"I guess it is hot enough," he said. "Don't want it to sear too quick."

At a sign from Ed Pico, the Abelardo brothers unroped Breen from the chair and shoved him over to a rough bench. They flung him on his face and began roping him down. Breen cursed them bitterly, but they only grinned. This was work to their liking.

Ed Pico twisted an old rag around the handle of the iron and came over to Breen.

"Shall I remove his shirt?" asked Joe.

"No need of it," replied Ed. "This will remove cloth as well as hide. Now, Breen, talk quickly. I will give you ten seconds to tell where the diamonds are located. Feel the warmth of the iron?"

He held it close to Breen's back, and Breen flinched.

"They are buried under the fireplace," he said.

Ed Pico laughed and flung the iron aside.

"I thought a little heat would make you talk. Find a pick or a bar of some kind, Joe. If he has lied to us, he will get at least one brand before he gets a chance to lie again."

Joe found a short piece of drill steel in the kitchen. They extinguished the flames with water, and waited for the ashes to cease steaming. It was raining now, and the drops came hissing down the old flue. A flash of lightning illuminated the room brightly, followed quickly by a crash of thunder.

Ed Pico raked the ashes out across the hearth and attacked the heat hardened bottom of the fireplace. It was as hard as pottery. Joe held the lamp, while the Abelardos squatted at the corners, watching the operation closely.

"He lies," said Joe softly. "That has never been disturbed. See, it is as hard as stone."

"It would harden quickly if put back wet," grunted Ed. "See if there is not a pick around here. *Madre de Dios!*"

Just inside the door stood Lobo Gomez, water streaming off his huge sombrero. Behind him were two of his men, and each was covering the group at the fireplace with a rifle.

THE FOUR men got up slowly. Lobo's white teeth gleamed beneath the black of his mustache.

"Do not move," warned Gomez. "Their guns, Juan."

One man came forward and collected all the guns, taking them back to Gomez. The bandit chief motioned him to the kitchen with them, and then came forward a few paces. The man came back from the kitchen and Gomez sent him to get ropes. Breen laughed triumphantly, while Gomez's two men proceeded to rope the four men tightly, placing them against the wall.

"They threatened to brand me," said Breen, when one of the men removed his ropes. He sat up and rubbed his arms violently, while Gomez went over and inspected the fireplace.

"What were you looking for?" he asked Ed Pico.

"Ask Breen, he knows."

Breen laughed shortly.

"They captured me in Sicomoro. Thought I knew where the diamonds were. I lied. I needed time for you to come back. Where the devil have you been?"

Gomez grinned widely and spoke to one of the men. The fellow went out into the storm. Gomez kicked the charred sticks back into the fireplace, put dry wood on, and told his other man to rebuild the fire.

"I have been very busy," said Gomez expansively. "You shall see what I have been doing. Behold!"

With a dramatic gesture, he pointed toward the doorway.

First came Robert Maxwell, hatless, coatless, soaked to the skin, his hands tied behind him. His lips were bleeding from a blow in the mouth. Behind him came Marie and Juanita, white faced, dripping. Neither of them wore coat or hat. After them stumbled Buck Eads and Leo Herrera, their arms tightly roped at their sides. Then came the rest of Gomez's army—eight Mexicans and a couple of half clad Yaqui Indians.

Buck's right eye was swollen shut, and Leo was bleeding from a cut on his cheek. Taking them all in all, they were a helpless, bedraggled lot. Breen stared at them foolishly, checking them over. This was more than he had bargained for. Breen wet his dry lips and continued to stare.

Ed Pico laughed outright at the expression on Breen's face, and Breen whirled on him like a tiger.

"Shut up," he snapped.

"A fine mess," said Pico slowly, ignoring Breen's order. "You'll pay for this."

Breen struck him across the mouth, knocking him against the wall.

"You won't see the payment made," growled Breen angrily.

"What is the meaning of this, Breen?" asked Maxwell. "Did you send these men to raid my rancho?"

"That is my business," growled Breen. He went closer and looked at Marie, but she returned his gaze defiantly. Then he stepped over and faced Juanita.

"So you are Scotty McKee's daughter, eh? I knew him well. By God, you're a pretty girl."

He turned to Gomez.

"You didn't do so badly after all."

"I am Gomez."

"But you didn't get the one I wanted."

"He was not there. One man offered fight, and Felipe broke his head with a rifle barrel. For that, Felipe gets a bottle of tequila, eh?"

Breen scowled, but nodded. Gomez had gone too far, but it could not be helped now. Breen would have willingly traded them all for Brick Davidson, and throw in the Picos and Abelardos for good measure. He turned to Gomez, who was unroping the Chinaman.

"Where was the red head?" he asked.

Gomez shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"Who knows? These cattle will not tell."

Gomez spoke in Spanish, but they could all understand it.

"Who's cattle, you bat-eared pig?" asked Buck Eads. "Take these ropes off, and I'll fight the whole gang of you."

"When we take the ropes off—you won't know it," said Breen.

"Don't let them bluff you," advised Ed Pico. "Breen is a bag of dirty wind."

"What are you doin' over here?" asked Buck.

Ed Pico grinned sourly but did not reply.

"He made a mistake," growled Breen. "And it is a mistake for which he will pay well. Sit down along the wall, you folks. Take it easy while you can. Gomez, instruct that Chinaman to cook a lot of food. Open up some tequila. You'll find a case or two hidden in some baled hay in the stable. Give the men a drink —our men, of course."

"Breen," said Maxwell calmly, "you better turn us all loose. You are mad to do a thing like this. Correct this mistake before it is too late."

"Mad, eh? You think so, do you? I suppose you were not mad when you stole those diamonds, eh? You'll tell where they are, before I get through with you."

"You crazy fool, I never saw the diamonds. At least, send the women back home. They have no part in this."

"You think I will? Do I look like a fool, Maxwell? I'm boss down here, and by the time there is any investigation, I will be a long ways off. And as for the women—" Breen laughed shortly, "all is fair in love and war. My only regret is that we haven't the red head with us tonight."

"He will kill you for this," said Marie evenly.

"Will he? My dear, I am not afraid of your precious red head."

"You're a liar," snorted Buck Eads in English. "You swallered crooked when his name was mentioned. I dunno what it's all about, but my money is on the sorrel top to win."

"My bet rides with yours," said Ed Pico.

"He's toff bebbee," said Bill Abelardo, airing his English.

"Shut off," advised Al. "You get your face in tro'ble."

"Go ahead and have your say," advised Breen. "Words are nothing. You will quit talking when I give the word. Put the bottles on the table, Gomez."

He yanked the cork from a bottle and held it up.

"Good luck to you," he said sarcastically. "You'll need it before the night is over."

He drank heavily. The Mexicans grabbed for bottles, knocking the necks off against the table. A corkscrew meant nothing to them.

"Before you get too drunk, stop and realize what this means," advised Maxwell.

"I never get too drunk to run my own business."

"What's all this about you having the diamonds, Maxwell?" asked Ed Pico.

"That is one of Breen's insane theories."

Breen laughed and took another drink.

"Funny, isn't it? Pico thought I had them. He captured me in Sicomoro, intending to force a confession from me. I told him they were here at the rancho, so he brought me out. He was going to use a hot branding iron on my skin if I didn't tell him where they were. The fool was going to turn me over to the sheriff on a murder charge. I lied about the diamonds to get back here. You can see what happened to Mr. Pico."

"What murder was that—Dell Harper?" asked Buck Eads.

"No—a fellow named Sohmes."

"Did you kill Sohmes?" asked Maxwell.

"Pico says I did. What's the difference?"

BREEN and Gomez sat down in a corner of the room, each with a bottle of tequila. They talked in low tones. The two girls were badly frightened. Gomez's little army paid no attention to the cap-

tives. It was of little interest to them, as long as they had food and drink.

Out in the kitchen the Chinaman rattled pots and pans busily.

"What are we going to do?" whispered Juanita.

"What can we do?" returned Marie.

"Keep your nerve," advised Buck. "If they get drunk enough, we might have a chance. I'd give four bits for a cigaret."

"I'd give everythin' I've got for a six-gun," said Leo Herrera, eyeing Breen and Gomez.

It was raining hard now, and they could hear the water running off the eaves. The room began to grow smoky from the kitchen fireplace. Breen and Gomez finished their bottles, and a Mexican brought them two more.

"Go to it," grunted Buck. "That stuff will get 'em, if they take plenty."

The Chinaman came in and placed tin dishes on the table. He grinned wickedly at Ed Pico, who flung out a foot and tripped him. It amused the Mexicans, but it made Breen mad.

"One more move like that and I'll drill you full of holes," he said.

Ed Pico laughed, and drew up his foot as though to kick him. Breen sprang back and ordered two of his Mexicans to rope Pico's legs.

As Breen started to return to Gomez, he stopped suddenly. Above the noise of the storm came the unmistakable sound of a shot, followed quickly by two more. Gomez sprang to his feet.

"You had guards out?" snapped Breen.

"My two Yaquis—yes."

A horse pounded up to the door. Gomez flung it open and a man fell inside. Breen stepped aside and let him fall, covering him with a gun. It was Kelsey. He tried to sit up, but sprawled backward on the floor.

"What's wrong with you?" asked Breen savagely.

"He's been shot," said Gomez.

Kelsey's face was white. He stared around.

"Shot?" he said vacantly. "Oh, yes. Is Slade and Mahan here?"

"They're in— What do you mean?" asked Breen anxiously. "What about Slade? Did he come back?"

Kelsey nodded weakly.

"Came back. Jumped me in the stable—knocked me out. Going to get you, I think— Came ahead of me. Somebody shot me out there."

"They never came here," said Breen. "Did Slade know I sent the sheriff after him?"

"Maybe Mahan—told him. Who—shot—me, Breen?"

He stared at Breen, his mouth sagging. Then he wilted slowly to the floor.

"Put him in the stable," said Breen callously. "Your Yaquis are efficient, Lobo."

Two of the men picked him up and went out through the kitchen.

"They're breakin' bad for you, Breen," said Buck ominously.

"One more remark like that, and you'll follow Kelsey."

Buck blinked, but said nothing more. Breen was drunk enough to make good his threat.

SILENT and Mahan had no idea that Breen would be at the rancho. As far as they knew, Breen was still in Sicomoro, or on his way back to Gomez Springs. They were having a difficult time in keeping their horses on the old trail.

They were nearing the ranch house, and had lost the trail for a few minutes, when a flash of lightning revealed a rider galloping past them. The flash was so brief that they were unable to identify the horse or rider, but a few moments later they saw the flash of a rifle. Two flashes more followed.

Silent and Mahan drew their horses up together, wondering what it was all about. It was not long until they saw the door of the house open, and Kelsey fall through.

Mahan led the way and they circled far to the left, coming in at the rear of the old stable, where they dismounted. It

was raining hard, and both men were soaked to the skin.

"What was the meanin' of them shots?" queried Silent.

Mahan laughed softly.

"Lobo Gomez must have posted guards. It was a lucky thing that rider came past ahead of us. Wonder who he is, and what's goin' on at the house. Did you get a look at that horse?"

"Looked black to me."

"Kelsey rides a black. By golly, it might have been Kelsey. It would be just like him to ride out here to warn Breen. He'd know now that you and Breen would come to a showdown, and he might have taken a chance that Breen came here instead of going back to town."

They worked along the stable until they were near one of the doors. They heard the voices of the two Mexicans who were bringing the body of Kelsey out to the stable. Silent and Mahan crouched against the wall, and the two men went into the stable with their burden. They came out in a few moments and returned to the house.

"They were carryin' somethin'," said Silent. "Didn't you hear 'em gruntin'?"

"Let's take a look."

They slipped inside the stable, warm from the bodies of the horses. Silent struck a match and they looked around. Every stall contained a horse except the first, which was used for storage. Here a pair of boots were in evidence, sticking out from beneath an old blanket. Silent lighted another match, while Mahan removed the blanket.

"It was Kelsey," he said softly. "Dead as a door knob."

He covered the body again, and they went to the door.

"Kelsey got what we'd have got if we had been first," said Mahan. "Lobo must have posted his two Yaquis out there. I've seen 'em hit hawks on the wing with their old Mausers."

"Why would Gomez have guards out?" asked Silent. "Who is he afraid of. Looks kinda funny to me—on a night like this."

"It is kinda funny. I never thought of that. He wouldn't post 'em against Breen, or Breen's gang. Who else would he expect?"

Silent went back, lighted a few more matches, and looked at the horses. He came back to the doorway, where Mahan was watching the house.

"Them broncs has been rode hard tonight, Mahan. They ain't through steamin' yet. Gomez and his men have been for a ride."

"Mebbe they went over to capture your red headed friend."

"No, I don't believe that."

"You don't know Lobo Gomez."

"I suppose not. I know he wouldn't hesitate to cross the Border at night, but if he went tonight, Breen didn't know it, 'cause he sent the sheriff after me. He wouldn't want the sheriff at the Maxwell ranch if he knew Gomez was to be there."

"That might be true, but when it comes to devilment, Gomez would pick his own sweet time."

"I guess that's right. He's bull headed enough, that's a cinch. Our trouble is to find out what happened and who is in there. If Kelsey lived long enough, he told Breen what happened in town. Breen will be on the lookout for both of us, and if he and Lobo catch us, we'll be strung out alongside of Kelsey.

"Our best bet is to take it slow and easy. If another man comes out here, we'll both hop him, stick a gun under his chin and make him tell us the story. We won't dare investigate the house. It's so damn' dark right now that you couldn't see a man six feet away.

"Anyway it's warm and dry in here. We'll wait a while and see what happens."

CHAPTER XV

BRICK ON THE PROD

BRICK and Johnny missed the trail where it crossed the dry wash, and wandered around like a pair of lost geese in the storm. Neither of them were dressed for wet weather, and they were

sodden and discouraged by the time they found the path to Breen's rancho.

Brick was cautious. He knew just how far it was from the edge of the dry wash to the rancho, and he had a feeling that if the raiders had gone to the rancho, they would post a guard on the trail. Johnny was all set to ride right in, but Brick told him he was a fool.

"You won't be any good to 'em dead, Johnny. They may not be at the ranch, but we'll play that they are and do a little Injun actin'."

The wind made so much noise that there was little danger of any one hearing them, but it was also so dark that they could not see ahead for any distance. Brick led the way at a slow walk.

He knew they were nearing the rancho. Suddenly he stopped his horse. Not over fifty feet ahead some one had scratched a match. And through the drifting rain he saw the shadowy figures of the two Yaqui Indians, lighting cigarets. They were apparently crouched against a small mesquite near the trail, with a blanket half over them to break the force of the wind.

Brick dismounted quickly and Johnny piled off after him. They let their horses turn their rumps to the storm, knowing that they were both rein broke.

Brick whispered what he had seen to Johnny, who crouched beside him. Humped over, half crawling, they circled the two guards. Brick was filled with the lust of battle just now. They could have avoided the two Yaquis and gone on to the rancho, but both men, in range parlance, were on the prod.

The Indians were unconscious of their presence. They were there to try to prevent any one from coming in over that trail. They had shot at one man, who ignored their challenge. It was uncomfortable out there, and they huddled together under the old blanket, smoking, talking a mixture of Yaqui and Spanish, wishing Gomez had been thoughtful enough to have provided them with a bottle of tequila.

They had just agreed that the blanket was inadequate protection, when the top of the world seemed to crash down upon them. There was a flurry of arms and legs, the dull sound of gun barrels against skulls, then silence.

"How you comin', Johnny?"

"She's fine with me, pardner. Tore hell out of my shirt on that darn' mesquite. Tried to fall on the end of that cigaret, and there was a limb between me and the light. I'm settin' on mine."

"Roll him over here to me, then get some ropes."

Brick sat upon their prisoner while Johnny brought up the horses and produced ropes. Neither of the Indians was interested in the proceeding, although neither was seriously hurt. Brick roped them together, threw their guns away, stacked them up against the mesquite and covered them with the old blanket.

"The trail is now open," said Brick. "In case we want to make a quick getaway, we won't have anybody shootin' at the west end of us as we go east."

"Them Injuns will shore have somethin' to write on the rocks," laughed Johnny as they mounted. "I don't reckon there's any more guards scattered around.

"And don't never let anybody tell you that cigarets ain't injurious. If them Injuns hadn't learned to smoke, we wouldn't have seen 'em. They can blame cigarets for their downfall."

Brick led the way off the trail. He had a good idea of location, and wanted to approach the house from the rear. Their horses stopped against the corral fence. They dismounted, circled the fence, and came in behind the stable. They discovered the two saddles horses, but had no idea who owned them.

Brick climbed through the corral fence, where he found more horses, all saddled. He went back to Johnny and they moved their horses back to the side of the corral where they had first stopped. Brick whispered the news to Johnny.

"They're all here, I'll betcha," said Johnny. "Let's see what we can find in the stable."

Back around the fence they went, past the two horses, and felt their way along the wall to the door. They listened for a while, but heard nothing except the beat of the rain.

BRICK shoved the door open and stepped inside. It was as dark as the proverbial black cat in there—so dark that the storming night seemed light in comparison. The door swung shut behind them, and as Brick fumbled for a match, something crashed into him and he went backward, clutched in a vise-like grip.

He thought he heard Johnny cry out, and then they hit the hard floor of the stable. As far as Brick was concerned, the surprise only lasted a second. He was fighting when he hit the floor. He was as hard as nails and as wiry as a cat. The shock of the fall loosened the grip around his right arm, which he started working like a piston, throwing short arm punches into whoever was trying to hug him.

There was no noise except animal-like grunts, scuffing of feet, and the ripping of wet cloth. Brick had not been hurt yet.

He fought so fast that he finally broke the hold of the other man, twisted sideways on one shoulder, whirled over on his hands and knees, and filled his lungs with air. His gun had fallen from his holster. Anyway, he did not want to use the gun for fear of hitting Johnny.

He got cautiously to his feet, hunched forward, fists doubled, when a clutching hand brushed his arm. Quickly he stepped in and swung a right hand smash, guessing at distance and direction. His fist met solid resistance and a man grunted.

Before Brick could recover his balance, a blow caught him in the shoulder, almost knocking him off his feet. He went backward, caught his heel and sat down heavily. That punch hurt him. His right arm seemed paralyzed for a few moments. It was like the kick of a horse.

"Damn you, lay still," panted a voice. "I'll twist your arm off if you don't quit it. Kick me in the face, will you?"

"Look out, Mahan. I didn't get the other one."

"You did, but you don't know it, Silent," said Brick breathlessly.

"Eh?" grunted Silent. "Brick, is that you? You danged—"

"Go ahead and chide me," said Brick. "You big bull, you almost broke my shoulder."

"What's all this about?" asked Mahan.

"Keep your big fist out of my mouth," gritted Johnny. "I'll bite your fingers off if you do that again. Brick, are you hurt?"

Silent lighted a match and looked around. Mahan was on his knees, straddling Johnny Snow. Brick sat in the first stall, beside Kelsey's feet, a blank expression on his face.

"Mahan, meet Brick Davidson," said Silent.

"Glad to meetcha," nodded Mahan. "Kinda wet evenin', ain't it?"

Mahan's nose was bleeding and his upper lip swelling.

"It shore is wet," agreed Brick. "You might set on somethin' besides my pardner, Mr. Mahan."

"He's a damn' little buzz saw," said Mahan. "We thought you was a couple Mexicans. I choosed me this one in the dark, and I didn't much more than git ahold of him, when I says to myself, 'Mahan, if this here is a Mexican, what's the use of 'em bein' a downtrodden people'."

"But how come you to be here, Brick?" asked Silent, lighting more matches.

Brick recovered his gun and leaned against the wall. Johnny Snow got to his feet and brushed the dirt from his eyes.

It did not take Brick long to tell what had happened at the Rancho del Rosa. Silent took a chance and lighted the dirty old lantern, after shutting the door tightly.

Silent wanted to proceed to the house and start a battle.

"Do you think I'm goin' to stand for that dirty crew pawin' over them girls?" he demanded.

"I'll go with you," offered Johnny eagerly.

"And get both of you killed off," said Mahan. "That would only leave two of us to do the job right—and that ain't enough."

Brick eyed the legs and feet of the blanket covered body.

"That's Kelsey," explained Silent. "He was one of our gang. He was the one who told Breen about me goin' to the Maxwell place. I reckon he was Breen's chief stool pigeon. Anyway, he came ridin' hell for leather and got shot on the wing by a couple of Gomez's guards. He got to the house before he died, I reckon. They stacked him away out here."

"But how did you fellers get past them guards?" asked Mahan.

Brick explained what happened.

"You shore were lucky," declared Mahan. "I figure that Breen sent Gomez to capture you, and when Gomez didn't find you, he raised the whole danged outfit. Gomez ain't got no more conscience than a snake."

"Neither has Breen," said Silent.

"Not a trace. He's a white man gone bad. He's got to be bad, or lose out. No, I don't think Breen would stop at anythin'. That's why I'm worried about them girls."

"He'll probably burn Maxwell's feet tryin' to force him to tell where he hid the diamonds," said Silent. "If Maxwell don't know, or won't tell, you don't know what Breen might do. I think I'll walk right in and kill Breen and Gomez. With them out of the way, we've got a chance."

"Sounds easy," said Johnny hopefully.

"Shore," grunted Mahan sarcastically. "Don't be foolish. Breen is nobody's fool, and neither is Gomez. You'd never get in that house. If Kelsey lived long enough to talk, Breen will have the outside of the house plenty guarded. Them doors are six inch oak and the walls are two feet thick. You'd never get in. They'd wait until daylight and then pick us off.

"There's only one way out, unless you want to head back into the hills. Gomez could cut us off too quick."

"Then what are we goin' to do?" asked Silent.

"Wait and see. Wait for a break."

"Wait," snorted Johnny. "I didn't come over here to wait."

"I think Mahan's right," said Brick thoughtfully. "And another thing, I want Breen alive, if I can get him."

"Give me his ears," said Silent.

THINGS were not going so smoothly within the house. Gomez had drunk enough tequila to paralyze an ordinary man, and had become even more dangerous. Breen was drunk enough to brood upon his hate for the big outlaw. The Chinaman had piled a lot of smoking food on the table, and the men drew up their benches. Breen sat at one end of the table and Gomez at the other.

But Breen did not eat. He had a bottle of liquor at his elbow, which he drank sparingly now, realizing that he could not afford to get too drunk. Gomez ate noisily, guzzling his food, keeping his pig-like eyes upon Breen. The two girls huddled together, saying nothing. Maxwell sat against the wall, his back very straight, his face white in the lamplight.

Finally the big outlaw shoved his plate aside and lighted a cigaret. He looked over at the girls and grinned widely. Breen scowled. It was the first time that Gomez had paid any attention to them.

"You like theese place?" he asked in English.

"*Puerco*," said Juanita disgustedly.

Gomez stiffened, puffing his cheeks angrily. Ed Pico laughed aloud, but Gomez paid no attention to him.

"*Puerco*," muttered Gomez. "So that is your opinion, señorita?"

"Yes," she said bravely. "Your ancestors were all pigs—scavenger pigs, living in filth."

Gomez got to his feet unsteadily. Breen also got up and came around the table.

"Stop it, Lobo," he said. "You would

be a fool to expect a flattering opinion after what you have done tonight. I will pay you well for it, because these prisoners belong to me—not to you."

"How much do you pay?"

"I promised a thousand pesos for the red head. You failed to get him. These people I did not want. But it was not your fault, so I shall pay you the thousand pesos, and you will take your men back to town."

Gomez laughed nastily.

"A thousand pesos? And I ride away with my men while you force Maxwell to tell where the diamonds are. Is that your game, my friend? Do you think Gomez is a fool? I risked myself and my men tonight, and you offer a thousand pesos. You seek to use me as a tool, and then toss me aside. I am Gomez."

He struck himself on the chest and glared at Breen.

"Sic him, Tige," grunted Buck Eads. "Hop at him, Breen. I'd like to see you two cut throats tie into each other."

Breen turned to one of the Mexicans.

"Take a rag and gag that man."

The Mexican started to get up from the table, but Gomez motioned for him to stay seated.

"I order my own men," he told Breen.

"Do not let Breen boss things, Gomez," said Buck.

"Gag me that man," ordered Gomez, and the Mexican got up from the table.

"What the hell!" grunted Buck. "Side in with 'em and get a dirty rag in the mouth."

The rest of the assemblage kept still now, as none of them cared for a gag. Breen laughed softly, but there was a worried expression on his face.

"How much do you demand, Gomez?" he asked.

The big outlaw laughed deep in his chest.

"A change of tune, eh? How much? You will force Maxwell to tell what he knows of the diamonds? Certainly? Well—" he twisted his mustache thoughtfully—"I ask for one-half of the diamonds, and my share of these." He gestured toward the prisoners.

"Your share of these?" queried Breen. "What do you mean?"

"What will you do with the women?"

Breen hesitated. That was something he had not thought of. If any of them ever got back across the line, Breen would be damned in any country. Even Mexico would be too small for him.

He looked around the smoky room. Four men from Sicomoro, five people from the Rancho del Rosa. He could send then back safely, and perhaps nothing would ever come of it; that is, there would be no hue and cry for his scalp. He could never go back across the Border. In fact, he would have to go farther south in order to play safe. They knew he had hired Gomez to make the raid, and Gomez had said that one of the Maxwell cowboys had been killed.

The authorities would charge him with murder and raiding. It was not a pleasant outlook. If the Government knew of the raid, they would work through the Mexican government to apprehend him. And he could not depend upon all these people keeping still. They might promise anything in order to get away, and a forced promise is no promise at all.

But there was a spark of decency left in Breen's heart. It flared up for a moment and he turned to Gomez.

"The women go back," he said, "as soon as we force Maxwell to tell where the diamonds are hidden."

"You fool," said Maxwell coldly. "You know as well as I do that I have never seen the diamonds."

Gomez grinned and turned to Ed Pico. There was no love lost between these two, and Pico scowled up at him.

"You came here to get the diamonds from Breen?" asked Gomez.

"He admitted hiding them here."

"You forced me to admit a lie," said Breen quickly.

"Where did you get your information?" asked Gomez.

Ed Pico shrugged his shoulders.

"We have ways. It was said that Breen got the diamonds from Wong Kee,

and then had Wong Kee murdered. Harper did not carry the diamonds, but he was killed for a purpose—to place the blame on some one else."

"On the hijackers?" asked Gomez.

"Perhaps. It would then appear that Harper had been murdered and the diamonds stolen from him."

GOMEZ went back to the table and took a drink from his bottle. He had never thought of the incident in this light.

"And then Breen murdered Sohmes," said Ed Pico.

Gomez grunted softly and looked at Breen. Gomez knew Sohmes.

"That is a lie," gritted Breen angrily. "Whoever started that tale?"

"It seems to be generally known," said Maxwell slowly. "Sohmes was at my rancho, from where he went to Gomez Springs, and never returned."

"How do you know this?" demanded Breen coldly.

"You might ask the officers that question. It is no affair of mine."

The spark of decency died out quickly. Breen laughed harshly and took another drink.

"Well, suppose I did kill him?" he snarled. "You can't prove it. Even if you could prove it, what good would it do you? Are you the judge and jury? The law is a long ways from here. I do as I please."

He walked over to Ed Pico.

"You accuse me of murder, do you, Pico? Do you know any prayers, or shall I send for a priest? And you," speaking to Joe Pico, "what have you to say? And you, damn' Abelardos."

"He's toff *hombre*, Beel," said Al. Bill nodded slowly.

"I tell you one time," said Bill slowly, "we mak' meestake from not keel heem biffore. He's toff jeeger, you bet."

"You'll think I'm a tough jigger before I finish with you."

"I'm not scare from you," said Bill. "I'm jus' weesh for de rad had to come. Theese he's girl. *Dios!* He's get pretty damn' mad, theese rad had, you bat you."

Breen scowled down at Bill Abelardo.

"Which one is the red head's girl?" he asked.

Bill shrugged his shoulders.

"*Quien sabe?*"

"I think you lie, Abelardo."

"Bot you are not for sure, eh? Go 'head and mak' beeg meestake."

Breen walked back and sat down at the table. He studied the two girls. It seemed to amuse Gomez.

"I'd give ten thousand pesos to have the red head here," he said to Gomez. "Ten thousand pesos in hard cash."

"Go get him and pay the money to yourself," said Gomez. "I shall go across the Border no more. When I have settled with you, I shall go to Mexico City and live like a gentleman."

"And get hung," growled Breen.

Gomez laughed drunkenly.

"With money? Bah! I have never been a political—never took sides. What does Mexico City know about what is done up in this country?"

"How much money do you expect to get from me?"

"Sufficient for my needs, my friend. Perhaps you will need to go with me, eh? Let's have another bottle and come to a settlement."

Breen nodded and reached for a bottle.

"Plenty of time to talk about a settlement," he said. "The night is young. Perhaps we can make a deal between us."

He took a long drink and leaned over the table.

"It is really too bad that this house will not burn," he said.

"Burn?" Gomez wiped his dripping mustache with the back of his hand.

"Fire wipes out many things."

Gomez grinned and took another drink. He was not so dense that he did not get the significance of the remark.

"When do you send the women back home?" asked Maxwell.

Breen laughed and shook his head.

"We are not concerned with time down here."

"Don't be a fool, Breen. Remember

you are a white man, an American; not a savage. I can forgive you many things, if you send them safely home."

"Even to telling where you hid the diamonds?"

"I tell you I have never seen the diamonds."

"They go back when you tell. Don't hurry. Think it over."

Gomez leered at the girls, and finally got up and went over to them. He yanked Juanita to her feet and led her to the table.

"Sit down," he ordered, shoving her against the bench.

"What do you think you are doing?" asked Breen angrily.

"Observe closely," retorted Gomez, as he took the ropes off Juanita.

"Don't be a fool."

Gomez laughed harshly and patted Juanita on the shoulder.

"Why keep ropes on a dove, eh?" he laughed. "Have a drink?"

JUANITA rubbed her sore wrists, paying no attention to Gomez. He grasped her by the shoulder and roughly forced her to face him.

"You impossible brute," she said wearily.

Gomez grinned in her face.

"You are not afraid of me, eh? Good. I like a woman who is not afraid of me. So you are the daughter of McKee."

"Did you know my father?" she asked.

"Almost too well," laughed Gomez. "Ask our scowling friend at the other end of the table. He is drunk. But do not be afraid. There is not enough tequila in the world to make Gomez drunk. We are safe. Two Yaquis guarding the trail, a man at the front and one at the rear of the house. Our scowling friend fears the red head."

Gomez threw back his big head and laughed heartily.

"It is a good joke. He will pay me much money very soon. How would you like to go to Mexico City with me?"

"Don't be a fool," growled Breen. "I will pay you what you ask, except that there are no diamonds to divide. If I give you ten thousand pesos, will you take your men and leave this rancho?"

"So you have ten thousand pesos, eh?"

Breen bit his lip and ignored the question.

Gomez laughed, got to his feet and began pacing the floor. He was none too steady. Every eye in the room was upon him. He stopped in front of Ed Pico.

"You have said your prayers?" he asked. "Or are you waiting for our friend Breen to send for a priest? I believe he mentioned it."

"He whined like a puppy when he saw the hot iron," said Pico.

Gomez laughed drunkenly, nodding slowly. Breen got to his feet and came toward Pico, gripping a tequila bottle in his right hand, but the big outlaw stepped in front of him.

"Go and sit down," ordered Gomez. "I am in charge here, and my orders will be obeyed."

Breen moved back, realizing that he was little better off than the prisoners. Gomez whispered to Felipe, who seemed to be his lieutenant. The little Mexican nodded quickly. Breen turned his head slowly, and saw two of the rifle barrels carelessly pointed in his direction. Gomez could have disarmed Breen, but he probably chose to let Breen know that his gun would do him little good.

Gomez sat down again and looked at Juanita.

"I think I will marry you," he said. "Of these people," he swept a big hand in a gesture of contempt, "I have no concern. We will take payment from Breen, turn these people loose, and get married in Gomez Springs before we ride south with my men. How is that?"

"You drunken fool," snorted Breen. "By this time there are men in Gomez Springs who would kill you on sight. Marry her? She does not wish to marry you, and what priest would marry her to you, if she objected? You have the brain of a pig."

Gomez laughed at Breen.

"You think not, eh? Perhaps you want her. You would send for a priest to pray for Pico before you killed him, eh? And all I ask is an honorable marriage. Brain of a pig, eh? See what you pay, before I am through with you."

"I would not marry you," said Juanita firmly. "Breen is right—no priest would marry me to you. Let us all go home. There are plenty of girls in Mexico."

"That's right," agreed Breen.

Gomez scowled at Breen for several moments, but grinned when an idea struck him.

"This is good. I shall take this girl, priest or no priest. Then I shall turn all these folks loose, and let them take you across the Border. In that way you will not have long to worry about the payment you make to me. In that way, I shall atone for what I have done.

"What you say about the priest is true. No priest—" He stopped and stared at Juanita, who was looking at him, white faced, her hands clenched in her lap.

"*Madre de Dios!*" he exclaimed. "Felipe, go and get Padre Demente."

"Padre Demente?"

Felipe got slowly to his feet, staring at Gomez.

Padre Demente, a mad priest who lived alone in a tiny hut on the edge of the old dry wash, was notorious throughout that section of the country. Felipe knew him well, a weird figure of a man who kept his face covered and dressed in rags.

"But the *padre* is mad," faltered Felipe. "He would not come. Seldom will he speak."

"Tell him it is a case of death," laughed Gomez. "No *padre* would refuse that."

"Perhaps he is dead. I have not seen him for weeks."

"Go and get him!" roared Gomez, and Felipe obeyed meekly. Gomez turned to Juanita.

"This priest will marry us tonight. Take your choice between going with me as my wife, or not. But when we are married, I shall send all these folks back to their homes. Otherwise—" He shrugged his shoulders and opened a fresh bottle.

"I will marry you," said Juanita wearily.

"Good. Juan, go out and tell the Yaqui guards that Felipe rides for a priest and that he will be back."

Juan, short and squat, slightly unsteady, handed his rifle to another man, and went stumbling out through the front door. Breen studied Gomez through blood shot eyes. He realized that he was serious, and Breen had no relish to be turned over to Maxwell and the Pico brothers. A rope dangled before his eyes. Just now he could not see any way out.

"We might make it a double wedding," he suggested. "The four of us could go to Mexico City."

Gomez laughed at the idea, but made no comment.

"You'd be a fool to take any chances with Breen," said Ed Pico, who could see Breen tampering with their chances for a safe return home.

"When he tells me where the diamonds are," said Gomez meaningly, "I might trade with him. What are diamonds to a man's life?"

"I haven't any diamonds."

"I think," said Gomez slowly, "there will be but one marriage."

He turned his head to look back at Ed Pico and Breen surged to his feet and flung his tequila bottle. It was a sudden flash of intelligence on Breen's part. Felipe and Juan, the only two men of Gomez's crowd whom Gomez could depend upon, were out of the house.

The heavy bottle struck Gomez above the left ear, and the big outlaw fell sideways out of his seat. Breen's gun was out, covering the rest of Gomez's men, and they did not move.

GOMEZ had been knocked cold, sprawling flat on his face. Breen tied his hands behind his back, took away his gun, and dragged him against the wall. Not a word had been said by any one. Breen

stepped back to the table just as the door opened and Juan came in. The squat Mexican took in the situation with a glance.

"I am in charge here, Juan," said Breen.

Juan nodded shortly. He had found the Yaqui guards roped together beside the trail, and was anxious to tell Gomez about it; but Gomez was no longer in command.

"You told the guards?" asked Breen, lighting a cigaret with his left hand, while his right held a revolver below the top of the table.

"*Sí*," nodded Juan.

"Sit down against the wall over there. Gomez is no longer in charge here, and it will pay you to be loyal to me. I will not forget it."

"*Esta buena*," replied Juan, and sat down.

"Now," said Breen triumphantly, "the wheel of fortune has turned to my number—and I win. Let this crazy *padre* come. You will all be witnesses to a marriage, if this crazy fool is able to perform one. Juan, how far will Felipe have to go to find this Padre Demente?"

"Who knows? Perhaps two miles, if the *padre* is at his home. He wanders at times, and who knows where he may be found?"

Breen looked at Marie, his lips twisted into a sneer.

"You better pray that he is not wandering," said Breen meaningly.

The room was silent for several moments. The Chinaman brought in more dry mesquite roots which he piled on the fire, shuffling back to his place in the kitchen. Breen went over and looked at the heavy bar across the front door.

"Breen," said Maxwell, "you can't go through with this. Just stop and consider what it means. Play square with your own soul for a few moments, and you will realize what a terrible thing you are doing."

Breen laughed harshly.

"Soul! What is a soul? You think I'm at the end of my string, eh? Well, what if I am? I'll play to the last card."

"But what have we ever done to you? My daughter—"

"Do you want a gag, you fool? Your daughter was to marry me, when you stopped it. You stole a fortune in diamonds from me, damn you! And you can sit there and whine that you have done nothing to me."

"He had nothing to do with my feelings toward you," said Marie. "Blame me for that, if you care to blame anybody but yourself, you beast."

Breen leered at her, but said nothing. He lighted another cigaret and rested his elbows upon the table. The room was silent now, except for the crackle of the blaze, the soughing of the wind, and the dripping of rain outside. A man snored. It was Bill Abelardo, basking in the warmth of the fire.

CHAPTER XVI

BREEN CONFESSES

IT WAS a long time before Lobo Gomez recovered sufficiently to realize what had happened. His pig-like eyes finally cleared, he shifted his position a little, and looked at Breen. Three feet away from him was one of his own men, crouched against the wall, head sunk forward upon his arms.

The Chinaman came in with more wood, and the Mexican against the wall shifted his position. No one saw him, nor did they see the brown hand holding a small knife slip in past Gomez's elbow, and quickly cut the rope which bound the big outlaw's hands. Gomez did not move. Breen looked at him from time to time, but nothing aroused his suspicion.

Gomez did not dare move. He realized that Breen would kill him. Gomez had no gun, and the nearest one was a rifle, leaning against the wall beyond the man who had cut the rope. By the time he could jump up and grab that rifle, Breen would fill him with lead. Gomez decided to play possum and see how things came out.

There was the faithful Juan, sitting over there beside Maxwell, but Juan was unarmed. He had left his rifle when he went to speak with the two Yaquis along the trail. Time dragged slowly. Gusts of wind caused the old fireplace to smoke badly.

Suddenly there came a sharp knock at the back door. Breen jerked up quickly. Every head in the room came up. The Chinaman in the kitchen spoke sharply in Spanish, and they could hear the guard outside reply, although they could not distinguish the words.

"The Padre Demente," said the Chinaman.

"Unbar the door and let him in," growled Breen.

Breen had never seen the mad priest, but had heard him described many times. Still he was hardly prepared for the apparition which came slowly into the house. From the top of his head to his shoulders he was covered with an old gunnysack, filthy to the extreme, with two holes cut for his eyes. Around his shoulders and hanging almost to his knees was an old *serape*, ragged, soiled. His legs were bare and dirty, his shoeless feet muddy.

His hands were concealed within the folds of the dirty *serape*. He held it close to his body, and Breen slowly backed away as the priest came into the room, shuffling slowly.

"God, what a mess," grunted Breen in English, as he halted at the table.

The priest said nothing, but it seemed as though the eyes behind the sacking were scanning the room.

"Well, Padre," said Breen, breaking the silence, "you are welcome, although God knows, I do not care to be married by a gunnysack face. Take that damn' thing off. Say something. Here—have a drink."

He grasped a bottle and shoved it toward the priest, who made no move to accept it.

"Very well," said Breen. He turned to Marie. "Get up."

As Marie started to get to her feet, Gomez acted. Breen's back was turned, and Gomez got that rifle. In a second he was on his feet, the muzzle of it covering Breen's back. A sharp cry from Juanita caused Breen to turn.

"Now—your prayer," said Gomez. "The tables are turned and this time I kill you, Breen. Quick—your prayer."

Swiftly the priest stepped out of line, a hand whipped from beneath the dirty *serape*, and a heavy revolver thundered in the smoky room. Gomez dropped the rifle. He was falling back when the priest crashed into Breen, knocking him to the floor. But Breen was no quitter. They came up together, crashing down almost into Marie and her father. The Mexicans were on their feet, but none made any move to assist Breen. None would put a violent hand on a priest.

The fighters fell apart again. They scrambled to their feet. Breen tried to back away and draw his gun, but the priest was into him again, locking his arms tightly. This time Breen went down, striking his head against the packed adobe floor so hard that he went limp.

The priest got slowly to his feet, his breast heaving, and looked around.

"If there's anybody around here that's got a spare pair of pants, I'd like to borrow 'em," he said, panting a little, and with a sweep of his left hand, he jerked off his head covering.

Marie screamed as the lamplight flashed on Brick Davidson's red hair, but the rest of them were dumb. Brick was hunched forward, his six-shooter ready at his hip.

"Chinaman," said Brick slowly, "you *sabe* English. Go and unbar that back door."

WITHOUT a change of expression the Chinaman unbarred the door, and in came Silent, Johnny and Mahan, almost falling over each other. They were wet as drowned rats. Johnny was carrying Brick's clothes under one arm. Juanita was standing up, and Silent swept her off her feet in his first rush.

Johnny and Marie were close together, looking at each other.

"If you ain't goin' to do nothin' but stare at her, you might as well give me my pants," said Brick. "Mahan, watch this snake until I get my pants on, will you?" He pointed at Breen who was recovering. "Better take the ropes off the folks and tie him tight."

Brick grabbed his clothes and went into the kitchen where he soon made himself presentable. Every one in the other room was trying to talk at the same time. The prisoners were cut loose, even the Pico and Abelardo brothers. Gomez would never be a menace to anybody again.

Breen knew what had happened. He scowled at Brick when they sat him up in a chair, but said nothing. Maxwell told the boys what had happened in there, and of the raid upon the rancho.

"We shore was stuck," said Brick. "Mahan knew we never could smash those doors, and that there were guards at each one. We didn't want to start anythin', 'cause it might react on you folks. Our only chance to get in here was to outsmart Breen and Gomez.

"It shore was a blank outlook until this Felipe came, pawing around in the dark, tryin' to saddle a horse. We hopped on him good and plenty, y'betcha. He knowed Mahan pretty well, and after a little coaxin' he told us where he was goin'. Mahan had seen this crazy priest, and he knew how he dressed.

"I reckon Felipe was kinda disgusted with Gomez. He decided to play the game with us, if we'd let him off on the raid. We had to time things right, and we shore sweat blood out there, not knowin' just what might be goin' on in here.

"Then Felipe showed that he was on the square. He called his name to the guard, and talked with him, while we sneaked in and cooled him off. The rest of it was what you saw."

"Another moment, and Gomez would have killed Breen," said Maxwell.

"And ruined things for me," grinned Brick. "I could have bent a gun over Breen's head, and never taken a chance on him, but I wanted him alive."

Breen looked groggily at Brick.

"Wanted me alive, eh?" he gritted.

"Yeah—alive, you rattler. I'm goin' to take you back to Montana and hang you for the murder of Scotty McKee."

Breen laughed derisively.

"See if you can convict me of it."

"I'll bet he can," snorted Ed Pico. "I happen to know that McKee was one of your gang, Breen. You thought he beat you out of a valuable cargo, didn't you? Well, I got that cargo myself. Like a fool, you sent word to McKee that you were going to kill him. He sold out to me and headed North. But you found out where he was, went clear up there and tried to make him give back the money. And when he didn't have it to give you—you killed him."

Breen's lips tightened and his eyes gleamed their hate at Pico.

"This is Mexico," he said. "You can't take me out of here."

Brick put his hand on Breen's shoulder.

"Mexico ain't got a thing to do with this," he said. "You can take your choice. We can turn you over to the sheriff at Sicomoro, charge you with murder, raiding and kidnapping; or I can take you back to Montana and try you for the murder of Scotty McKee. I doubt if you'd ever come to trial down here. Take a look around and see the witnesses against you."

Breen wet his lips.

"Well," he said slowly, "what do you want me to do?"

"Confess right now to the murder of Scotty McKee."

Breen hesitated. Anything would be better than what they might do to him for what he had done that night. They knew he had hired Gomez to make the raid. Even Gomez's men would swear to that.

"I confess to that murder," he said. "I killed Scotty McKee. He double-crossed me, and I killed him."

"When we get to the rancho, you'll put that in writin', Breen."

"Yes. But you've got to protect me."

"These people will keep silent about you, until I get you away."

The Mexicans helped them saddle the horses, and no doubt they were glad to see the gringoes ride away. It left them free to use the tequila.

MAHAN rode with Brick and Maxwell to the Border. Mahan was not bashful. He gave them a resumé of his crimes, and Maxwell promised to use his influence to bring Mahan back to good standing. Mahan did not tell Maxwell that he came to the rancho to try to force Breen to give up the diamonds, and Silent would never tell that part. Anyway, Silent was too busy talking with Juanita, to care what was said or done.

It was daylight when they rode into the Rancho del Rosa, where they found the sheriff, deputy sheriff and two members of the Border patrol. Slim had recovered sufficiently to ride and had gone to Sicomoro, looking for help. He had a faint recollection of Brick and Johnny having been at the rancho, but it was too much like a dream. They had only been at the rancho a short time when the cavalcade came into sight, and Slim was the first one to reach them.

Breen was their only prisoner, and the sheriff wanted to take charge of him, but Brick objected.

"I've got him for a murder in Montana," said Brick. "He's confessed before all these folks, and promised to write it out in detail here at this place. He killed the man that Slade was accused of murderin'."

Breen had nothing to say. He was roped to his saddle, and his horse was being led by Buck Eads, who said he was "jist dyin' for Breen to make a break". Buck's mouth was still sore from the gag.

They rode into the patio and began dismounting. The sheriff was anxious to get the details of what had been done, but it seemed as though everybody was too worn out to talk with him.

In dismounting, Buck dropped the lead rope by accident. Breen was watching for any slip that might be made, and the rope had no more than touched the ground when he jabbed the horse with his heels, let out a yelp, and the animal dashed for the east arch.

Silent made a grab for the rope, but the horse struck him, sending him spinning. The horse and rider disappeared around the corner. Brick was into his saddle, with the horse almost on the run, and narrowly escaped smashing into the arch.

Breen was playing in luck for the moment. His horse had headed south, and luckily the lead rope had looped around one of the stirrups. Breen was leaning forward, urging the horse with short jabs of his heels and an assortment of profanity, when Brick's sorrel settled down to the job. Brick's rope was out, the loop swinging behind him, as they went crashing down the long slope.

The sorrel was a cow horse, nosing right in after Breen at top speed. The loop went singing, dropped over the fleeing horses's head, and Brick took a quick turn around the horn of his saddle.

There was nothing delicate in Brick's work. He wanted to stop Breen, and he wanted to stop him right now. The horse whirled off it's feet, jerked completely around, and went crashing down into a mass of sagebrush.

Brick was down and running along the rope before the sheriff, Buck Eads and Berry, the Government man, arrived.

Breen was unhurt, except in spirit, and he cursed Brick bitterly while the red head unroped him from the saddle. The sheriff took Breen by the arm, and Brick ran back to slacken his rope from the saddlehorn.

He stopped beside the sorrel and looked at his saddle, the fork of which seemed to have upset, pulling the saddle out of shape. It was something he had never seen happen to a saddle. The horn was sticking straight out, the leather stretched to the breaking point from the pull of the rope.

Brick drew out his knife and slashed along the leather, which ripped under the

sharp blade. The sorrel jerked back when the horn and rope flipped loose. Berry was coming toward Brick, while Buck helped the sheriff to take care of Breen.

The loose end of a piece of cloth flapped from the torn fork of the saddle, and Brick made a quick examination. It proved to be a soft cloth bag, which had been sewn into the fork.

"By the horn on the moon!" exploded Brick. "C'mere, Berry."

He cut open the bag and took one look.

"Hang on to that horse," he ordered, and dashed for the sheriff's mount.

The sheriff yelled at him, but Brick did not stop. Berry was already in Brick's saddle, pawing at the broken fork, trying to dislodge the cloth bag.

"Diamonds," Brick yelled at the puzzled sheriff, who paid no attention.

Brick dismounted on the run, digging his heels into the dirt. The crowd at the gate watched, and wondered why he had come back so fast. They had seen him capture Breen.

Brick's jaw was set tightly. He stepped up to Joe Pico, his gun leveled.

"Stick 'em up," he barked, and Joe obeyed quickly.

"I arrest you for the murder of Dell Harper," snapped Brick.

Joe's face went white, and his eyes shifted nervously. The sheriff rode up quickly, wondering what it was all about.

"You shore was a fool to steal that saddle," said Brick, as the sheriff stepped in beside him.

"What's it all about?" asked the officer.

"The day I came here," panted Brick, "I won a horse and saddle from Joe Pico. Joe Pico shot Dell Harper that day, and took Dell's saddle. Dell Harper was smugglin' diamonds. The fork of that saddle is holler. Mebby there's diamonds inside the cantle."

"What diamonds?" queried the mystified sheriff. He didn't know anything about smuggled diamonds. Brick rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Dell Harper was a smuggler," he said slowly. "I reckon he was in cahoots with a gang across the Border."

The sheriff turned to Joe.

"Did you know Dell Harper had diamonds with him, Joe?"

Joe grimaced disgustedly.

"Do you think I'd have gambled off that saddle if I had known. I didn't know anything about it. Harper and I have never been friends. I saw him in Gomez Springs that day, and we met again up here. I asked him where he got that saddle, and he said he just bought it in Gomez Springs from old man Beeman.

"We got to arguin' about things, and he called me a damn' hijacker. Harper had been drinking too. I called him something, and he reached for his gun. I beat him to it, that's all. I guess I was a fool to take that saddle, but I liked the looks of it. I threw my saddle in the brush and took his. It was self-defense, but I couldn't prove it."

Buck had a death grip on Breen, who made no comment. Berry had the sack loose now, and he was just a little puzzled as to what to do.

"Here's a fortune in diamonds," he said, "but I'll have to confiscate them."

"And I've been settin' on 'em all this time," wailed Brick. "Well, it's all right with me. As far as Pico is concerned, I reckon the law will give him an even break because he killed a smuggler. He says it was self-defense."

"It sure was," said Joe, growing a little easier.

"He's sure toff jeeger," said Bill Abelardo.

"Who—Joe?" asked Al.

"Not Joe—de rad had."

"How about putting Breen in my jail for tonight?" asked the sheriff. "You've got to notify your county."

"I'll go with you," said Brick. "That party is worth a lot to me. He can write his confession in the jail."

Brick saw Breen locked safely in the jail, and then sent a telegram to Harp Harris.

WIRE AUTHORITY AND TRANSPORTATION FOR ME TO BRING BACK MURDERER OF SCOTTY MCKEE STOP NAME IS JIM BREEN AND HAS CONFESSED STOP SILENT SLADE WILL COME BACK WITH ME BRINGING HIS OWN PRISONER BUT HE DON'T NEED ANY HANDCUFFS.

—BRICK DAVIDSON

BRICK did not go back to the Rancho del Rosa that morning. He took a room at the hotel, where he slept until five o'clock that afternoon. Some one was pounding on the door and he got up to let Johnny Snow, Buck Eads and Silent Slade into the room. They did sort of a war dance around him.

"Silent is goin' to be married," announced Johnny. "We're goin' to have a weddin' at the rancho, and you're goin' to be best man, Brick."

"No question about it," grinned Brick.

"And that goes any way you want to look at it," declared Silent. "C'mon down, Brick, the girls are downstairs waitin' for you."

Marie met him at the foot of the stairs and held out both hands. The rest of them moved over by the doorway.

"Brick Davidson," she said softly, winking back the tears, "I can't say anything. Dad has found that the mortgage never was recorded. Everything has turned out for the best—even the diamonds are in the proper hands. Dad can't thank you. He told me that he couldn't even talk to you—there's so much to thank you for."

"Well, I enjoyed the little party," smiled Brick. "Everythin' is all right again, Marie. Give Johnny a lot of credit for helpin' put the thing over. He tells me that Silent and Juanita are goin' to be married at the rancho."

"Oh, isn't that wonderful?"

"Why don'tcha make it a double one? I know danged well Johnny—"

"Don't, Brick."

"Oh, I'm shore sorry, Marie. I reckon I spoke out of turn."

"It isn't that so much. But don't you see, he—he's never— Well, I don't know where in the world you ever got that idea. I've never had a hint of such a thing."

Marie's eyes were sparkling, but her cheeks flushed deeply.

"Gosh, I reckon that's right," exclaimed Brick. "I've shore kept that boy awful busy lately. Well, I'll tell him that from now on—"

"You will tell him nothing, Brick Davidson.

"No-o-o?"

"Who do you think he is—Miles Standish?"

"Miles— Oh, yea—" Brick chuckled deeply. "Why don'tcha speak for yourself, John? Oh, yea— Well, I'll tell him. Sa-a-ay! You wasn't meanin' me?"

Marie looked up at him, her eyes clouding quickly.

"Brick, I'm sorry," she said softly. "I like you so well, and you've done so much for us."

"Well, now don'tcha feel sorry. Gosh, I thought for a minute I was goin' to hurt your feelin's. It's all fine, little woman."

"Brick," called Silent. "Here's a telegram for you. Been here at the desk since noon, but they wouldn't wake you up."

Brick tore it open.

WIRING PLENTY TRANSPORTATION BUT YOU'LL HAVE TO USE YOUR OWN AUTHORITY STOP SOAPY SAID YOU'D DO IT AND HURRAH FOR YOU STOP NEXT TIME YOU WANT TO RESIGN A JOB PLEASE SIGN YOUR NAME TO IT STOP ALL OF SUN DOG WAITING.

—HARP HARRIS, ACTING SHERIFF

Brick read it over twice, a puzzled expression in his eyes. For the life of him he could not remember whether he signed his name to that resignation or not. Soapy was one of the commissioners, and he was just stubborn enough to block their acceptance, if it was not signed.

The sheriff came in, looking for Brick, and Brick showed him the telegram.

"I'm still hazy on the whole deal," said the sheriff. "Won't anybody tell me what happened across the Border. I've asked everybody, and they all tell me to

ask you. Who and what in the devil are you, anyway?"

"Me?" grinned Brick. "Well, I thought I was just a red headed trouble maker, but I find I'm still the sheriff of Sun Dog."

"I can see that by the telegram. C'mere."

He drew Brick aside and lowered his voice.

"Davidson, who was in on that smugglin' deal with Harper? You and me both know that Dell Harper never had money enough to handle this side of the proposition. Who was behind Harper?"

"Well, I'll tell you who I think."

Brick whispered one word. The sheriff looked blankly at him, turned slowly and walked outside, where Berry and Mitchell were waiting for him.

"Did he tell you who it was?" asked Berry in a whisper.

The sheriff nodded slowly, rubbing his stubbled chin.

"Yea-a-ah. He said it prob'ly was the devil."

Berry nodded gravely.

"That won't hardly satisfy the revenue department, so I'll say that Harper was the man, and let it go at that."

"And it can't hurt Harper," said the sheriff. "I was told to invite you boys to the weddin' at the Rancho del Rosa tonight—Slade and the McKee girl."

"Are you sure they want us?" asked Berry.

"I hope to tell you, they do. Why, they've even invited Ed Pico and the Abelardo boys."

"Well," laughed Berry, "under those circumstances, I reckon we can leave the Border unguarded for the evenin'."

AND THEY all came. Bill and Al wore white collars and almost choked to death. Brick was best man, and he stood very straight and solemn beside Marie during the ceremony. It was the Abelardos first wedding, and they did not seem to appreciate the solemnity of it all. Perhaps they thought it was Brick's wedding. At any rate, as the minister prayed over them, Bill thought out loud.

"He's sure toff jeeger all right."

"Sure," agreed Al, "theese rad had ees *mucho malo*—damn' good *hombre*."

After the ceremony, Maxwell took Brick aside, while the rest of them filed into the dining room.

"You are going to leave us?" he asked.

"Oh, sure," smiled Brick. "I've got to go back home, Maxwell."

"I know, I've talked with Juanita. God knows, I wish you luck, Brick. And if things ever break badly for you, don't forget that anything and everything on the Rancho del Rosa is yours for the asking. Slim says he is going back to Arizona, so I am making Johnny Snow foreman, and giving him a share in the rancho. Marie said it would please you, because you like Johnny so well."

"Please me?" Brick looked through the dining room door where the guests were being seated. Johnny and Marie were near the door, heads not over a few inches apart talking earnestly.

"You know, I'd do anything to please you, Brick," said Maxwell.

Brick turned and looked at him, and they smiled at each other in mutual understanding.

"Thank you," said Brick. "I hope Johnny appreciates it."

THE END

ROLL DOWN TO HILO

By BILL ADAMS

(They advertise in Boston, New York, and Buffalo,
Five hundred young Americans a-whaling for to go.)

COME, drop your lines, young farmer lad!
Come, hang up the harness!
Leave the old men, leave the women, to the farmland furrows now.
Leave the sowing of the rye,
Leave the seeding of the barley,
Leave another lad to follow,
If he must, the shining plough.
There's a whaler lies at Bedford;
Blue Peter's at her fore.
There's a richer harvest waiting you
A thousand leagues off shore;
Where the sperm whale goes a-swimming,
Where the salty breezes blow,
And the Southern Cross hangs gleaming
O'er the road the whale ships go.
There's where they call you! Aye, there's the place to be;
A-hunting of the whale fish down the furrows of the sea.

It's a fine wide way to Hilo. The furrows tumble green.
Hilo's a fine place as ever you'll have seen.

Come, hang the harness, farmer lad!
The whaler calls a crew!
There's whale bone, and ambergris, and oil awaiting you.

Come, kiss your love, young farmer lad!
Bid her the long goodby.
The seas are rolling fresh and green,
There's wind along the sky.
Leave the weaklings, leave the women, to the farmland furrows now.
Leave the seeding of the barley
And the guiding of the plough.

There's a bright harpoon awaits you.
There's the whale fish in the deep.
It's a fine wide way to Hilo,
So come waken from your sleep!
Aye, kiss your love, young farmer lad,
Bid her the long farewell;
For a whale ship lies a-lifting,
All impatient on the swell.

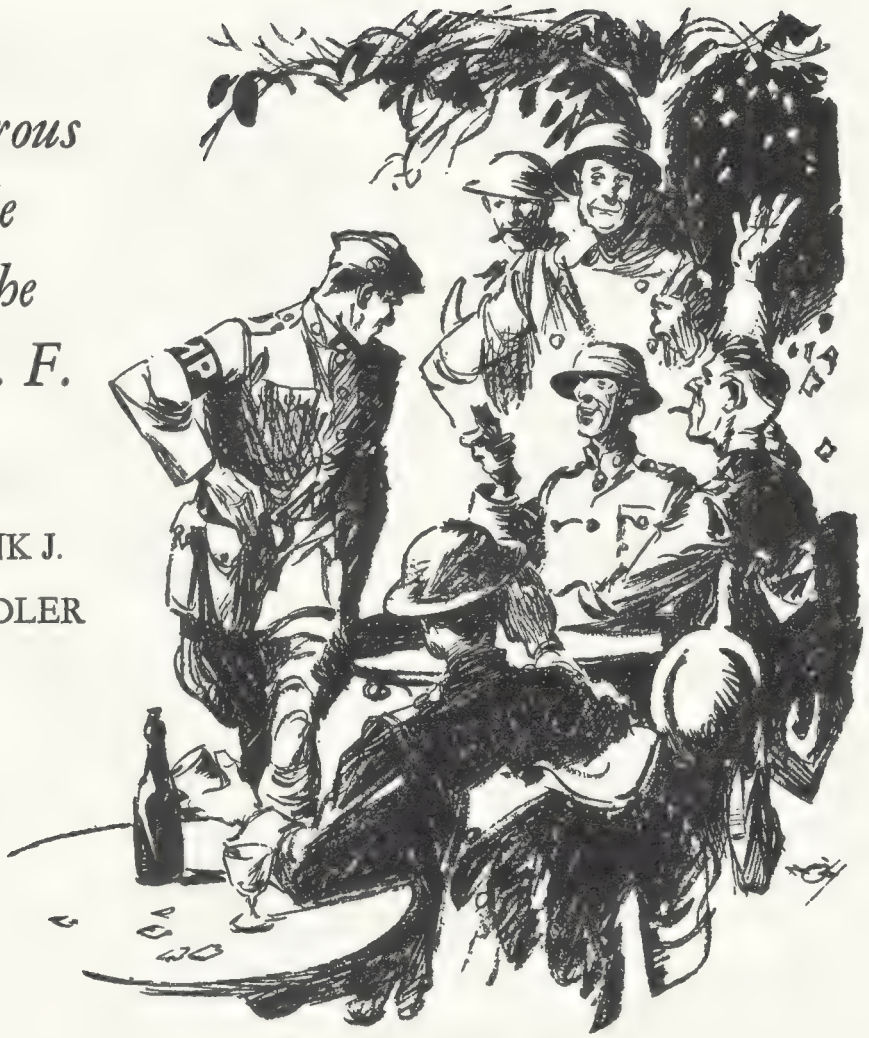
Hilo's a fine place. It's there all together
Meet the bold crews of the whale ships
From out the windy weather.
You'll gam of the fishing, and brave tales you'll tell
When the anchor lights are twinkling
And the watchman strikes the bell.
There's ambergris waits you, there's whale oil, there's gold.
Come, lay away your ploughshare
And get your bedding rolled!

It's a fine wide way to Hilo. The furrows tumble green.
Hilo's a fine port as ever you'll have seen.

A humorous tale of the A. E. F.

by

FRANK J. SCHINDLER



TIN EARS *and* TINNED TOMATOES

SOME of the soldiers called the town Swipes, others said it should have been called Seeps, others claimed it was pronounced Soups. When they put the proposition up to Ptomaine Pete Papadapolos—

"Yes, I theenk Zoups is right."

Ptomaine was the company cook and he was right at home in a town named Zoups. Anyway, Swipes or Seeps or Zoups, it was a typical rest billet town. It had been hammered by artillery fire and had been patched up with everything that would close a hole: tobacco tins, elephant iron, packing cases, carton bristol board, packing case lumber and old shirts.

Soldiers were swapping lies and talking shop, which consisted of tales of former wars. One soldier, who must have been a voracious reader, was telling about a war that was a war, when soldiers were sol-

diers and not M. P's, who formerly sold bananas in the shadow of Bunker Hill. This was told for the benefit of Pietro Verdi, the military policeman, to whom it was mostly so much Siwash and went over his head, so to speak. Pete Green, they called him, which is Pietro Verdi in English. He was a great character and always quarreling with the other Pete, the Ptomaine individual who turned out the slum in his wheeled smoke box. Of course, there was a woman back of their enmity, but that was nobody's business, least of all, ours. The slur about the bananas was a literal slam, as Pietro had told many in his own inimitable way:

"Shure, I come-a to dees-a countree an' sell-a the banan' in Boston. I poosh-a th' cart all the way down on th' strit where Paula De Riviero ride-a hees horse. Meester Weelson, he say to me, 'Pietro you come-a fight for my countree an' I make-a you one-a fine-a Amerikana man —citizen.' So I go fight fer Meester Weelson an' I get it a paper say I am citizen."

"And they made an M. P. out of you," remarked the learned story teller dryly. "Whatta break."

The learned story teller winked at his listeners and went on, saying—

"Over the Alps lies Italy," and went on and told about Hannibal's forays into Italy, of the time he surprised a Roman army at Lake Trasimene, caught forty thousand Romans in a blinding mist and annihilated them. It was a rather sad tale for Italian ears and Pietro, who knew not so much about the history of the country of his birth, fell back on the old alibi of muttering, "Bull", or perhaps even wilder terms. The terms might be enlightening, but they're taboo. He got scant sympathy for his mutterings and heard rude remarks about his ancestors being "not so hot".

The learned story teller got Hannibal out of his system and another soldier spoke up:

"Well, that was a good war. But you ought to hear the one Dick Small, that 'Y' guy told us. He said he was out fishing and threw his line in the water and hooked a ten pound fish. The fish pulled back so hard that the hook snapped out of its mouth and flew back and hooked him in the nose—"

"So he shoved his nose in the water, a forty pound bass took it for a red flannel and he dragged it into the boat," the learned story teller interrupted. "Yeah, he told me that story fourteen years ago, when we were war correspondents with the Russian army—the time they fought the Japs. There was a tough war. I got shot in the shoulder and Dick got shot in the leg. One of the docs was operating on a guy for 'pendicitis and, right after that, the band drummer missed his bass drum. Damned if that doc didn't sew the bass drum up in this guy."

Some of his listeners snorted derisively, while others regarded him pityingly or reproachfully. Too much was plenty. A yarn was a yarn, but stretching the truth until it cried out loudly, "Grapefruit! Rhubarb . . . !"

Pietro argued that it couldn't be done—he took it literally—but he was given the coarse equine laugh and told to run along and "three sheet" along the main stem and keep his eyes open for violators of Army regulations. In disgust, he started across the street.

As he did so, Ptomaine Pete stepped out of his billet, nursing a soft tomato in his right hand. He smirked at the soldiers, brushed up his black mustache with the back of one hand and, just as Pietro reached the other side of the street, the Athenian exponent of what the well fed soldier ate, wound up like Herb Pennock and let fly at the Neapolitan *gendarme.* The overripe love apple caught Pietro flush on his helmet and squirted like a small geyser.

"Right over the pan, Pete," the learned story teller giggled. "When you win this war you oughta sign up with the Boston Braves. That's worth a fag. Have one. What do we eat today—zoup and slum?"

Pietro turned, and he was mad. He was a pugnacious individual anyway; there was nothing wrong with his courage.

However, whoever had appointed him to act as a military policeman had a sad sense of humor; he surely shoved a round peg in a square hole that time.

Anyway, Pietro turned, ready to do bodily injury to the *soldato* that trifled with the majesty of the military law. He glared at the soldiers, who were all lighting cigarets, and saw that they had been joined by Ptomaine. He took a fresh grip on his club. Ah-ha! There was the Greek in the wood pile. No need to ask who had thrown the love apple.

He took a step forward, but something else drew his attention. A big truck roared around a corner and came to a stop. A dozen soldiers vaulted over the sides of the truck and gathered in a knot on the sidewalk. They gazed around with that "So this is Paris" look.

Strange soldiers, Pietro reasoned. They probably were not wised up to the regulations in this town and they would bear watching. So, instead of going over to argue with Ptomaine, he walked to a decapitated lamp post and leaned nonchalantly against it, after the manner of a well bred M. P. watching the newcomers. Ptomaine Pete and his companions watched both Pietro and the newcomers, for it was always a good show when Pietro spoke his classic phrase—

"You can't stand there, soldier."

The strange soldiers, having taken a good look at their surroundings, pulled notebooks out of their pockets and began writing in them. They tore out the leaves of the notebooks and passed them around among each other, and then they threw them away. They did more scribbling in their notebooks, passed more leaves, and leaves of the notebooks fluttered along the walk like dry leaves in an autumn breeze.

This was all wrong from Pietro's standpoint. One of his orders was—

"See that those soldiers keep this street policed; don't let any one dump anything into the street."

Well, these soldiers were littering the street with paper and that was no Roman josh.

Pietro decided to call a halt on this promiscuous paper throwing; and to Pietro decision meant action. He swaggered over to them, after the manner of the well mannered M. P., and spoke his piece.

"You can'd-a stand-a here, soldiers."

The soldiers regarded him with blank stares and one of them remarked—

"Yeah, nice day," and scribbled something in his book.

He tore out the leaf and passed it around.

This leaf made the circuit, caused some laughter, and then was relegated to the walk with the others. More writing ensued and more leaves were exchanged and then discarded.

Had Pietro looked at the soldiers' buttons, he would have seen that they were artillery men, but he was getting hot under the collar.

"What's-a mat?" he expostulated. "You can'd-a stand-a here, soldiers. You fill-a the whole-a strit with dees-a paper. If you wanna write-a th' let', you should go by the Whyum-see-hey or the Knights of the Christofero Colombo."

"Yeah, maybe it will rain, buddy," volunteered a sergeant.

"Rain!" exploded Pietro. "Who the hell spiks about-a th' rain? Here you rain paper all over-a th' strit. Look! Here an' here an' there, the whole strit will be full-a the paper."

THE SERGEANT silenced him with a gesture and wrote something in his book. He tore this out and passed it around. This message caused more scribbling, which was exchanged, contents read and noted, and then went to join the rest of the discarded scribbles.

Whereat English failed Pietro and he let the soldiers have it in good Bologna Latin; Bologna being a city of Italy and not a sausage. At the moment he was gesturing and orating like Benito Mussolini addressing the Fascisti black shirts. These khaki shirted warriors regarded him with wonder and nodded their heads approvingly. At last, however, Pietro

ran out of Bologna Latin and, also, breath.

A corporal took advantage of the intermission to scrawl something in his book. He tore this out and handed it to Pietro. He looked at it and shook his head.

"No read *Anglais*," he said.

The soldiers regarded him dumbly and shook their heads. The corporal shoved in a dirty finger and ran it along his scrawl. Pietro followed the dirty finger and shook his head.

"No read *Anglais*," he repeated, and dropped the piece of paper, shattering the very regulation he was yelling about.

The soldiers shrugged their shoulders; some grinned, and more messages were exchanged, all of which eventually joined the rest of the paper along the walk.

"You keed-a me!" howled Pietro, addressing the sergeant, and tapped his M. P. insignia with his club.

"Yeah, buddy, you're an M. P," this worthy drawled. "I know; I can read. Ain't nothin' to get excited about, that I know of."

"Excited!" yelled Pietro. "Then why you spill-a all dees-a paper on-a the strit? What's-a mat? You got—what chew say—billets?"

The sergeant shook his head and inquired—

"Well, why didn't you marry the woman then?"

"Woman?" inquired Pietro. "Marry woman? What the hell you spik?"

The sergeant raised his hand, regarded Pietro with amusement, and scribbled another line, which he handed to the M. P.

"*Compree?*" he inquired.

"*Non compree*," Pietro replied, shaking his head.

The sergeant turned an exasperated look on his companions and scratched the back of his head. This was a hell of a war! Here was an American M. P. and he couldn't read, neither did he *compre*. He was neither fish nor fowl, and sported an American uniform.

The soldiers with Ptomaine Pete were watching the show and grinning like a flock of Cheshire cats.

"Maybe they spick Grick," said Ptomaine, as if he had a wonderful inspiration.

"Nix, don't butt in," the learned story teller objected. "They're wagon soldiers, I guess. Wait'll we see how this turns out."

Another truck turned the corner and came to a stop, and a dozen more soldiers jumped out, like so many brown beetles, and joined the others. They also had writing materials and now twenty-four pencils commenced flying. There was a great exchange of notes and much looking at Pietro, which made him ill at ease. He seemed to have an idea that the soldiers were about to gang him.

A dozen bits of paper were shoved toward him, written in English, German, Bohemian, French, Swedish, Dutch; in short, every language except Italian. He looked them over, ejaculated "Bah!" and tossed them over his head.

"What's-a mat with youse-a guys?" Pietro demanded.

The sergeant regarded him with disgust, put his fingers to his nose and looked around for some one who could *compre*. At the moment a captain and a lieutenant turned the corner and the soldiers smiled as if their appearance made them happy. Nobody bothered to salute, except Pietro, who promptly snapped his hand up. The two officers returned his salute and the sergeant scribbled industriously and handed the sheet of paper to the captain.

He and the lieutenant read the missive and then gave Pietro dirty looks.

"What's-a mat with dees-a *soldatos?*" Pietro confronted the captain.

The captain strong armed him to one side, just as if pushing by a honey cart, and did some writing of his own. This note went from hand to hand and the soldiers nodded their heads. The captain looked at the lieutenant, and the lieutenant snapped his fingers, held up four fingers of his right hand, nodded his head, and the soldiers fell into columns of

fours. The lieutenant waved his hand and the columns stepped off and marched down the street.

Pietro gazed after them with his mouth open, then looked at the walk all littered with paper, and his nanny took a big, long leap for itself. He unloosed a stream of Bologna profanity and slammed his club to the walk. The club struck on end, bounced high in the air, came down and crashed on his helmet. And then the soldiers with Ptomaine very politely gave him the raspberry. He picked up the club and started to throw it, but the soldiers all dodged into doorways and gave him plenty of gangway.

Pietro stepped over to one of the trucks, the driver of which, a fat Frenchman with a black beard, was reading a ragged newspaper and smoking a sixty horsepower corn cob pipe.

"What's-a mat with those-a guys?" Pietro asked Blackbeard.

Blackbeard reflected a moment, spit without removing his pipe from his mouth, and said he did not *compree.*

Pietro tried it in Italian.

Blackbeard removed his pipe and answered him in the same language.

"Bah!" he snorted. "What do you know about war? You Roman worm, you think you're a grand *soldato* because you have a uniform and are in the *gendarmerie.* Those men are artillerymen. For twenty hours they have been firing cannons that stood hub to hub and *echelon* to *echelon.* They're deaf as a post. The good God only knows if some of them will ever hear again. Those are soldiers, Roman. You and I, we are merely poor cogs in a big machine. *Adieu, Malafach.*"

Blackbeard made a sarcastic gesture with his hand, such as only a Frenchman can make, threw his big gas wagon into gear and rolled away.

A sadder and not any more wiser M. P. took a walk around several squares, coming back to where he started. The street had been policed and Ptomaine was working over his rolling kitchens, getting out his quota of zoup and slum. He smiled blandly at Pietro as he went by, and Pietro looked daggers at him. He sauntered over to where a mess sergeant stood behind a tall stack of canned goods. He picked up a can of tomatoes, grinned malevolently, and pointed to Ptomaine, whose back was turned.

"Beyond the Alps lies Grick," he informed the wondering mess sergeant, pointing over the barricade of cans.

He made a sweep with his arm and the can left his hand, described a parabola and thumped Ptomaine on the head. The Greek screamed to high heaven that he was being killed, assassinated, murdered. His cries brought a multitude of soldiers on the run, while Pietro made himself scarce.

"What's the matter?" asked the learned story teller. "Did the M. P. sock him with a tomato?"

"Boy, he sure did!" the mess sergeant grinned. "But the damned fool forgot to take it out of the can."

The learned story teller smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, well, boys will be boys. This would be a hell of a war if it wasn't for guys like those two. It's a *schoenste* army, no foolin'. Stop that yellin', Ptomaine. We'll paint you with iodine, mark you duty, and you get out that slum. I'm getting hungry."

The GUNSTORE RAT

Even a starving man refused his money

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

A LITTLE man with the tiny black eyes of a rat made the crowd in the Mendova gunstore nervous. He came darting in one November night when the first norther of the season was blowing down the Mississippi bottoms, bringing flocks of many kinds of wild fowl in the whistling gale.

"I saw the big gold shotgun out front," the newcomer said. "I knowed 'at anybody passing through, off the river or coming over the bridge'd be welcome. It's a cold night, boys. It'd be bad camped up in the park, or with an anchor line stretched in the eddy off the mud bar."

"Trippin' down?" one asked casually.

"I'm just passing through," the man replied brightly. "Fire feels good tonight. So's a bowl of hot soup an' roast pork I had across the street in the Good Feeder. Warms a man right up."

Thus he evaded answering questions as he glanced from face to face, not looking into the eyes of any one of them. He pulled a rickety armchair close to the stove and twitched in it nervously. As he leaned over, it was noticed that at his side was a bulge, apparently that of a short gun. He simulated a certain genial affability. His nose was pointed, his forehead and chin sloping into it.

None of the boys addressed him. There were few groups in the Mendova gunstore which did not contain naturally loquacious men, whose experiences had been diverse, as sportsmen of high ideals and river pirates of the most desperate stamp. The fact was never stated in so many words, but when detectives, policemen and members of the sheriff's department came to sit in the shop of the gunstore, they left their professional scruples outside. They did not even scrutinize closely the countenances of the men who sat along the walls of the workroom, where everything was done from re-tiring babycart wheels to making new parts for obsolete or hand made firearms.

The Rat gave no name. He just came poking in afternoons and evenings at odd

times. Sometimes he remained only a few minutes—especially if he knew that one of the taciturn visitors was an officer of the law. Perhaps he did not know that they regarded the gunstore as neutral ground, not subject to the laws. It was one of those strange places where *noblesse oblige* obtained, lending to hunted human quarry a place of refuge. Yet, shrewd eyes studied the tense, active little man covertly and, during his absence, he was rather freely discussed.

Deputy Sheriff Parkler was certain that he had seen his picture among the reward notices, but was unable to find the particular dodger which referred to the fellow. He sized him up for a pickpocket or sneak. A lanky visitor out of the cow country, whose eyes were as blue as the desert skies, twisted his face into an expression of disgust at sight or word of the fellow.

"You couldn't he'p but despise that kind." The cowboy shook his head.

Apparently the little stranger was a city man. He had come from the slums, certainly, which may have accounted for the fact that he used perfume. A good deal can be learned from the perfumery of men and women. There are delicacies and refinements in scents by which one can express personality, character, and even a degree of civilization.

The Rat was strong with musk—the Siberian deer musk which enchants the air of the seraglios and harems and dance halls of the Orient. Some slum gunmen have attained the degree of taste which chooses the nearly impalpable blends of scent, but the Rat had not.

When he sat in the warmth of the workshop of the Mendova gunstore, his musk perfume permeated the sultry air. Although he was usually the only one present who used scent, there were others whose entry into the room titillated the olfactory organ with equal vigor. Whenever trappers came down from the hills and mountains to the east, or up out of the Arkansas bottoms across the river, they, too, were more or less reminiscent of beaver or mink; muskrat or otter, skunk or coyote. The old-timers could very nearly tell whether a man was a mountain or a river bottom trapper by his trailing odors.

The expert catcher of otter and beaver was, for instance, distinct from the ratter and skunker. Men accustomed to the camps and cabins of the open country of the arid region, found the scents strong, but generally not at all disagreeable. Those who lived in the humid climates were accustomed to the close and heavy air, and did not mind even the strong sulphur blends of the weasel tribes, or mink itself. But the Rat's musk was coupled with his personality and character, and its sweetish, penetrating scent drove more than one husky fellow quickly to take his departure for less genial, but more bearable companionship.

THE RAT would watch those who detested him leave the shop, his lips snarling back into his flat cheeks like the straight edges of an angle, the apex of which was at the base of his upper lip, which sloped back from his nostrils. He knew their disgust and resented it, but said nothing. His attempts to be a good fellow failed, of course. He thrust himself into the gathering of outlaws and sportsmen, trappers and hunters, shantyboaters and spot-fur seekers of the auto trails, always an intruder and always unwelcome. Even when one man came in and announced that he had not eaten for two days, and the Rat darted a five dollar bill at him in an odd flash of generosity, the starving man flinched before he accepted charity from such a hand.

"Thankee," the man said, taking the money and going out.

The others had been ready with their two bits; one with a silver dollar, but the Rat had beat them all to it.

The man returned an hour later. The Rat had taken his departure by that time.

"I didn't need it," the man announced.

He dropped the bill on the workbench where it lay till the next afternoon, when the gaunt old storekeeper and gunsmith

looked over his glasses and told the Rat that it was his. The little man shrank up, glaring at the money as if it were cheese guarded by a trap's jaws.

"That feller last night said he didn't need it," the store keeper explained.

The Rat snatched it up, turned it over in his hands and then furtively glanced back and forth along the lines of men against the walls and on the stove benches. His money was no good. Even a starving man refused it, gave it back when some other luck came his way. The Rat saw the point, flinched at it; but no tremor of pity for his ostracism moved the fellows sitting around. True, they were hard men—game killers, trappers, doubtless an outlaw or two—yet every one had a heart in his chest capable of much sympathy; but who ever felt sorry for a rat? There were no rodents among these predatory humans.

The Rat had been darting in and out of the Mendova gunstore for more than six weeks. Curiosity about him had grown, but not one habitué betrayed his interest to the Rat, though talk about him was generally much freer than about others, whose privacy was respected.

Then two others of the same kind appeared. They were perfumed; one with strong Turkish rose, the other with a delicate musk blend. They were dandies. One was talkative and the other was reticent. The talker was chubby, double-chinned and thick lipped, always smiling. He talked of "N'Yark" and "Chi" and "Sin Lose." He carried pockets full of cigars and cigarets, and gave them away in handfuls.

Such liberality seldom won welcome in the Mendova gunstore, but from Louie it caused no offense. He was a good fellow; beamed and exuded his camaraderie as he waddled along. He called his companion Joe—"Joe do this"—and Joe did it.

Joe was dark and a shadow hunter, lurking in the background, and sitting where he had his back to walls and could see every one around him. They were just visiting—that was all. No business, no plans, offensive to no one at all.

They dragged Mendova, though. Wherever the gunstore boys went they found Louie and Joe had been, or were going. Up Poplar and down Main, along Ferry and over on the Slough, into the shantyboats at the Ridge and along the Mud Bar—wherever the public was entertained, Louie and Joe knew.

They spent money freely. They took a police lieutenant to dinner with them. They were effusive toward Jake Riggar, superintendent of the Carcajous, and they recognized the heavy set, dark faced, sunken eyed fellow who spent hours every day and evening in the gunstore, saying nothing, yet friendly in his bearing. All knew he was a gun—a good one—but he minded his own business and bothered no one. His identity was a secret—Louie and Joe knew him well, but they said nothing. He knew them, too.

The Rat came darting in one night ten days after the arrival of Louie and Joe. Chance had it that this was the first time the trio had met in the store. He just slithered out of the gloomy front part of the place into the workshop, appearing without a sound into the light, where he was surrounded upon all sides by the habitués. He came to a sudden stop, staring into the wide, thick lipped, smiling face of Louie.

"Hello, Jakie." Louie grinned broadly.

"Louie!" the Rat squeaked.

"Yeh—Louie," the squat fellow said. "And Joe, too."

The Rat turned with his rodent-like quickness. Behind him, in the shadow between two shelf ends, was just space enough for an old armchair with a wooden seat. In the seat was Joe, his polished patent leather toes and glowering brown eyes plainly visible. The Rat's nose twitched and his beady black eyes blinked. He looked back at Louie, then returned to Joe. His pointed nose turned slowly toward the alley door, and along the counter aisles to the Main Street entrance. Then he sat down. Louie took a seat opposite him. Louie told a story. He just had more stories to tell than

almost any one who ever came to the Mendova gunstore.

ONE TIME Louie had found a fellow in hard luck—hungry and sick. He was being supported by his sister, a good girl who worked in a swell "ladies'-wear" store, where she was stenographer and bookkeeper. Louie knew the girl, so he took this brother of hers off her hands.

"You remember dat?" Louie shot at the Rat, who ducked his head in assent.

"Then this brother, he was pretty well after he come back from Hot Springs," Louie went on. "When he arrived home this fellow joined in with the rest of the mob. He was good, too. Then one time he worked the big doublecross—sure he did.

"You remember dat?" Louie asked the Rat.

The Rat ducked, answering that he remembered, and Louie went into a long explanation, which, nevertheless, failed to reveal the nature of the business in which they were engaged. Apparently it was profitable, and the brother had proven faithless more than once, till finally the partners were all "on", and the combine broke up as regarded one of the mob.

Louie talked and smiled widely for upwards of an hour. All the time the usually loquacious Rat did not say a word. At intervals he flicked a silken handkerchief across his face, swirling musk into the air.

"I'm hungry," Louie finally remarked. "Come on Joe—you too, Jakie. Le's eat. Any of you gentlemen want to dine with us tonight?"

None did. They all preferred not to be in on this reunion of old acquaintances. Accordingly the three took their departure, crossing the street to Hungry Man's row, where they went to the corner and took a booth at a two dollar cover charge —the most expensive place in town. Despite Louie's genial air, the gunstore group realized that the Rat was perturbed and in trouble. Generally every one there minded his own business, but Jack Biggar and a city detective watched the restaurant and saw the three emerge after two hours, enter a big roadster with an Iowa license and roll away.

About three o'clock the following morning, the same roadster rolled up to the county hospital and two horns were blown alternately at the wrought iron gate until the watchman went out to see what was the matter. He found Louie hanging over the side door, feebly trying to press the wheel horn button harder. Joe was slumped down in the car in front of the seat, dead.

Louie was shot in three places. Joe was shot twice—once in the head and once in the side just above his narrow leather belt. The police were notified and the county attorney came swiftly to the call. Lying on his back, Louie was still smiling, pale of face and blue lipped. His eyes were dull and sunken.

"It was an accident," he whispered. "It was all right. I don't know who shot me. No—I have nothing to say."

So he died, presently, on the operating table. An examination of the roadster discovered that the front license did not match the rear one numerically by some 30,000. Both of the dead men had several driving licenses, all stolen, it was easily ascertained. The number of the car was also blotted. The two men were not identified. They had thirteen thousand dollars in cash and enough diamonds for a very presentable appearance by a modest society belle—had they been mounted for a lady. The evening paper was full of the story of the mysterious shooting affray. The gunstore end of it remained untold in print, however. Habitués of gunstores are not apt to talk freely outside, and it chanced that no inkling reached the headquarters reporters of the Rat's being taken for a ride.

The boys in the repair shop of the Mendova gunstore talked over the matter that night. They had liked Louie. They had not liked Joe or the Rat, Jakie. Theories were advanced briefly, but no one knew anything about it. Mere talk was uninteresting. All were sitting

very quiet, wondering, with just the fire whispering, as soft coal does, and a chunk of greenwood whistles sounding in the big heater, when in the alley behind the store something made an odd noise.

The alley was, of course, quite dark, as important alleys usually are. In front, the line of stores were even, but the backs were not. The alley was rough with worn macadam. The listeners cocked their ears. They heard something fall, a barrel or two, some empty wooden packing cases and the clatter of loose short boards. The gunsmith gazed at the rear door over his spectacles and reached for a long, powerful flashlight. Three others drew flashes from their pockets, and the rear door of the gunstore was opened. The beams of light revealed a river fog had spread up the bank, over the city and through the streets.

A stack of packing cases and barrels had leaned against the rear wall of the store. Some of these had fallen, and the process of collapsing continued, the side caving with wads of paper and bunches of excelsior. A trapper and a coon hunter ran over to look into an opening that suddenly appeared in the pyramid. They reached in and dragged out a man by the heels. The heels were patent leather, but muddied; the trouser legs were bedraggled.

Into view came the slight frame and blue white face of the Rat, Jakie. He was quivering convulsively. Rolled over on his back, he smelled of musk—a small bottle of the stuff had broken in his pocket.

The lights revealed that he had been shot. A trail of blood led into the alley from the paved street. On the sidewalk there were the red drips. Backtracked, the Rat was found to have come up the river front street, heading for the alley behind the gunstore. There he had crawled under the empty barrels and packing boxes. He was dead when the ambulance arrived—hit five times by the bullets of automatics. But his own automatics had been fired nine times between them, according to the clips.

THE YELLOW FLAME

THE MOON was high in the sky, and before long it would be morning. A soft breeze stirred, but the stark, bare trees in the *kraal* round the store scarcely knew it. Cleaver noiselessly drew himself up on his cot and called to the boy, lying on his bed at the far side of the mud hut.

"S-s-something creeping about, Walt," he whispered. "S-s-some animal prowling round. Can you hear it?"

Strangely, soft as it was, the sound had wakened the youngster, though his interest was only inquisitiveness.

"Certainly I can hear it, Cleaver," he answered. "Pa Lizard chasing Ma in the grass in the roof, I expect."

"K-k-kaffirs!" Cleaver gasped. "The K-k-kaffirs have come at last, Walt!"

"No?" the boy countered, as if inquiring.

The youngster was not any too certain, and his hand reached for his revolver. The weapon held but three cartridges.

The arm, as if stretching to pull aside the mat, showed again. Not the faintest sound accompanied it.

"Rot!" the boy muttered. "It's the wind, Cleaver, twisting the reeds and making shadows. We're overstrung. Let's go back to sleep."

In a voice whose shiver shook the bed, Cleaver uttered a blank denial.

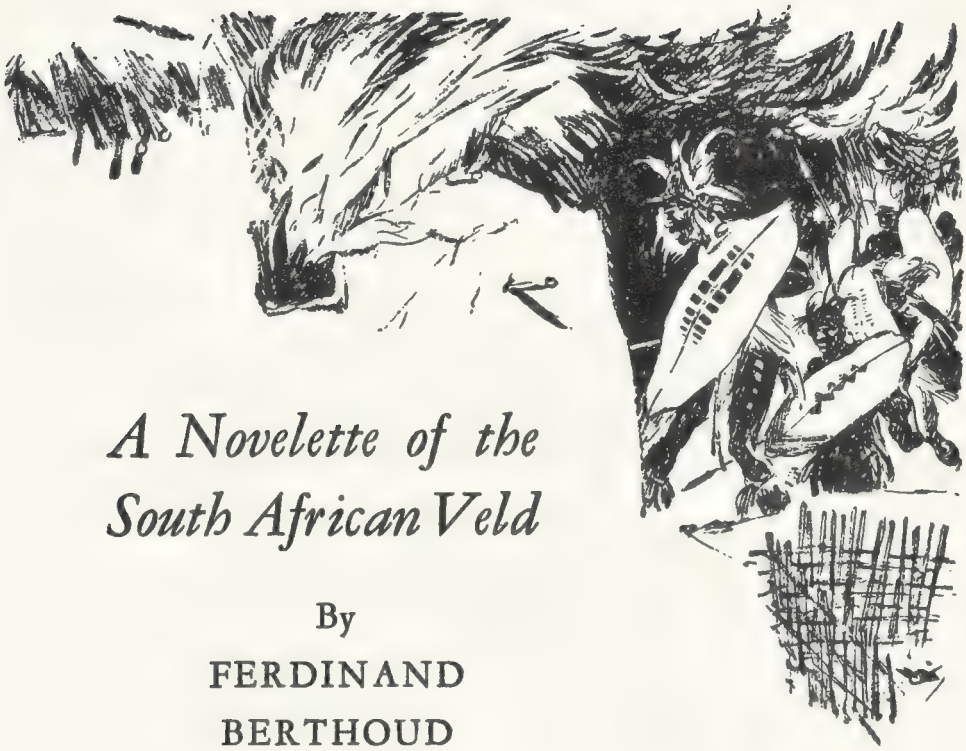
"It's K-k-kaffirs, Walt. You g-get up and take a look and see."

Accustomed as he was to doing the adventurous, Walt slid into his slippers and brushed the hanging mat to one side. In the open, he saw a bright clear moon, and a bare yard which shone whitely. For a moment the boy peered around, then came back and flopped into his bed.

"Rats, Cleaver," he said disgustedly. "You're always inventing bogies. You'll make me as big a coward as yourself."

"It's r-r-real," the other insisted. "It's r-r-real."

The stirring above became sharper, and



A Novelette of the South African Veld

By
FERDINAND
BERTHOUD

they sat tensely. The stirring stopped, then seemed to have moved across the acre of *kraal* yard. Cleaver's feet flicked away the blankets, while his hands gripped a loaded carbine. The carbine, like the revolver with but three cartridges, was not of much use, for after each shot it jammed.

"A l-l-leopard! A l-l-leopard!" Cleaver's voice shuddered. "There's a l-l-leopard in the stable with the mules."

The creeping had been catlike, but the movements were too tiny. The coach mules assuredly were restless, but that was nothing unusual. The boy felt no fear.

"An old mule biting his leg," he scorned. "A jack mule cleaning his teeth."

Cleaver picked up the carbine and came over to him.

"It's a l-l-leopard, Walt. We must go and s-s-save the mules."

For a moment the youngster argued, then found the slippers once more.

"Spooks—bogies—wimwams," he said scornfully. "For a man born right here in this old Africa of ours, you're the biggest coward I've ever met. Last night it was a tree trunk placed across the path to throw you off your horse, and a mob of Kaffirs hiding in the bush to get you. Now this. Why waste a cartridge on a ghost?"

"It's a l-l-leopard," Cleaver persisted, and placed the faulty carbine in the boy's hands. "If y-y-you'd ever seen what I have, you w-wouldn't be so cocky t-t-talking about cowardice. We've g-got to kill that leopard. You g-g-go out and walk over to the st-t-table in front of me. I'll f-f-follow with a b-b-box of matches. When you g-get into the st-t-table I'll st-t-trike a match, then you fire."

In disgust, and not understanding the tragedy of total loss of self-reliance, brought on by a past nerve-shattering terror, the boy derisively mocked.

"What you saw? Poppycock! I've

heard that tale a dozen times. And suppose your trembling hand forgets to strike the match when I get to the stable? What then?"

IN THE gloom of the open stable, the mules were fretting. Across the yard to their rescue marched the grim procession of two. Pajamas fluttered in the cold night breeze, and gave impetus to the shivering of legs. The boy was not so confident now, and he held the carbine firm and ready. There could be no second shot.

The fifty yards to the stable were covered, and through its open end the inside was black. Mules scuffled and fidgeted, and one emitted a peevish squeal. The boy marched steadily on.

The edge of the stable was reached, Cleaver an appreciable distance in the rear. Walt hesitated a second, then took the desperate course. Two careful, feeling steps, then the solid darkness got him.

A glare from a match flared up, and furtive shadows danced. On the manger, still among them, was a large crouching thing. Hardly aiming, the boy raised the carbine. A crack, and the shock rocked the silent yard.

The old hen and her half grown brood that had been roosting in a line along the manger had been plugged from end to end.

Cleaver fell out of his fright like a dropped plummet, and a greater one rushed in.

"G-g-god, Walt," he gasped. "They'll hear th-th-that shot at the fort. A crowd'll come g-g-galloping over. W-w-what tale will you have to tell?"

The unthinking lad, tingling from excitement, was cruel.

"The best joke of the whole darned rebellion, Cleaver. The truth. I'll bet the reason you were even too big a coward to finish studying that surgery you talk of, was your baa-lamb fear of blood. I'll tell 'em, right enough!"

Cleaver hurried back to the hut, the boy following more casually. Outside the entrance Walt met him, returning with a blanket. His action looked businesslike.

"Where you going with the cosy little blanket, Cleaver?" the youngster jeered. "Going to sit with the dear departed, and wail and hold a wake?"

The unhappy man shuddered.

"G-g-going to c-c-collect the birds and the f-f-feathers, Walt. G-g-going to hide them under my bed before the police come. You w-w-won't tell 'em about it, Walt, will you? My G-g-god! Don't let it get out!"

"Let it out?" the boy laughed. "Let it out—when you sent me ahead with the gun?"

Ten excited police galloped to the top of the hill above the dry river bed and then, in sight of the store, spread out into a cordon. The rough building was silent, no mud-and-grass huts in flames. No lurking Kaffirs were visible, no signs of human life. The raid and murders must be over, the enemy up and away.

The ten men, no longer fearing ambush, drew together and approached the place. From a hut at the back flickered the light of a single candle. The small detachment dismounted and the sergeant went in. Surprised at the calm, his first words were an angry query as to the meaning of the unnecessary shot, and the consequent spoiling of his night's rest. Cleaver, flashing an appeal with his eyes to the boy, shook his head dumbly. But the boy was unmerciful.

"Here's the battle, Jack," he said to the wondering sergeant.

He pulled a blanketed bundle from beneath Cleaver's bed.

"There are the attackers, the killed and wounded. My hero partner's been fighting an old hen and her venomous, armed, bloodthirsty chicks."

Sick at heart and sick of stomach, the scorned man sought to justify himself.

"There was a l-l-leopard or a l-l-lion about half the night," he explained. "It m-m-must have c-c-cleared off when it heard us coming. Walt m-m-made a mistake, and fired in the dark."

"Not a bit of it," the boy contradicted, and told the story with unction. "Cleaver

was scared till he nearly was weeping, and I just shot to bring back his courage. The poor little man suffers from spells."

The sergeant snorted.

"Another instance of these sober jim-jams, eh?"

"No." Cleaver hoped to laugh it off. "Let's go in and get the real jim-jams, Jack."

But trying to be a good fellow made no difference. Though he opened the store and stood drinks innumerable, not an incident of the idiotic yarn would down. The more liquor the sergeant lowered the more fluent became the humor of his scathing vocabulary.

That sergeant had not seen a man rush desperately to the aid of two friends and, as a prisoner, held by natives while two whites were frightfully tortured to death before his eyes, had not heard their agonized, wracking shrieks, nor experienced the sensations of one who knew he was to be served the same; neither had he seen Cleaver's escape with hell pounding behind him, and know his terrified thoughts as he fled. Like the rest, the sergeant did not believe him. They had never found the remains of the two dead. And a previous good record as a volunteer in two Kaffir wars did not carry weight.

As he swung into his saddle, the sergeant scoffed:

"You're a natural born funk, Cleaver; that's what you are. You ought to associate with girls. All you Afrikanders are cowards, and you're the biggest.

"That tree of yours across the path last night to throw you, must have been a hollow trunk dragged there by some of the piccanins belonging to the friendlies about the fort, and your great band of armed Kaffirs but old women carrying calabashes of Kaffir beer. Those fairy tales don't fool us.

"The best thing you can do, Cleaver, is sell your store and go to the Coast and teach kindergarten. Little kids won't bite you. Next time you do any shooting after dark you'll do your shooting alone. You can take my word for that.

"Fluffy! Mother's darling! So long!"

DRIVER and kaffir jumped down from the ten mule, leather swung coach. The Kaffir, helped by natives from the store, began outspanning the mules to change pairs. Bulawayo was but sixty miles above, but this was to be the fifth new span.

The driver, bringing the waybill, entered the store. Behind him straggled the half dozen passengers. He looked upon mules as his only care. One, or rather two of the passengers, apparently, were his only trouble.

"*Baas*," he said, addressing Cleaver, "this missis say she want go back Bulawayo. Missis say six hundred mile to Mafeking; six, seven day coach, too much for baby. Say she sorry she start. Missis say she want stop here till nex' coach go up."

Cleaver took one look at the woman, who was standing against the whisky and beer case counter, with an eighteen months old boy hugged to her breast, and his hand shook till the waybill rustled.

"W-w-what?" he said huskily, and the impending calamity brushed away his civility. "M-m-me have a w-w-woman st-t-taying at this store?"

Pushing the driver aside, the woman edged herself directly in front of Cleaver.

"You've *got* to put me up in one of these old bee'ive 'uts of yourn, or somewhere," she said. "Me an' the kid cawn't stand anuvver week of this."

Cleaver caught the touch of London, and at once shot his clinching argument.

"You c-c-can't stay here, young lady. I w-w-won't take the r-r-responsibility. You're s-s-safe in the coach and on the road, b-b-but here at any minute K-k-kaffirs may come and wipe you out."

From somewhere the woman produced a revolver and slammed it on the counter.

"Kaffirs be 'anged!" she snapped. "I eyn't got no love for Kaffirs at no time, an' I'd pip one through the gizzard soon as look at 'im. Me an' the kid eyn't goin' on dahn in that red 'ot biscuit box on wheels, an' you've got to tyke care of us. You're coach eygent, eyn't you?"

There was no denying that, but a mud store was not a hotel, and being host to mules did not call for the accommodation of passengers. Cleaver still had a hope, though it was dwindling.

"G-g-go on down to Tati, missis. That's only s-s-sixty miles further. Th-th-there's a hotel down there."

The woman placed the child on the counter, and the youngster did not whimper. The boy actually smiled. The lady had everything settled in her mind.

"When I told 'Erbert I was goin' to marry 'im we got married," she announced. "When I tell you I'm goin' to stye in this 'ere marble paliss of yourn I'm goin' to stye."

Cleaver stared like a beaten dog at the short, dark woman whose chin had a self-assured perk, and for an instant wondered how a man felt who still had will-power; whether the two campaign medals laid safely away really were his own. Then the baby smiled again.

"If you c-c-can put up with only a st-t-tretcher and blankets—" he hesitated—"if you c-c-can eat bully beef and s-s-sour dough bread, and if you w-w-won't want a guard doing sentry-go all night, I'll d-d-do my best."

The woman rapped the revolver on the crude counter.

"Guard? Sentry-go?" she said. "Who wants sentry-go? The bloke what hinterferes with little Beryl won't never cock 'is little finger no more when 'e 'oists 'is cup of tea."

The mules had been changed and the driver came back for his waybill. The Capeboy grinned at the persistent woman.

"Coach go, missis," he told her. "Missis come on? Missis stay?"

The woman turned and, standing off as from a polecat, jerked her thumb to the way of exit.

"*Voetsack, incha!*" she ordered, and in two words used two different languages. "Go aht an' get my bag. I'm lydy of the manor 'ere. I'm hinvited to be the honored guest."

Again the Capeboy grinned. Perhaps the native was gifted with foresight.

THE WOMAN was there, and there was no mistaking it. The next thing was to get her away quickly. No coach was due for two days—and that only barring accidents—and those two days were going to be an earthly foretaste of Hades. Four whiskies—though as a rule Cleaver was distinctly temperate—helped him to think things out.

Natives were rushed to arrange a hut for her; a stretcher was made as comfortable as possible, and rude seats and a packing case for a dressing table were moved in. The woman stood stolidly at the counter during the interval, taking drink for drink with Cleaver; the baby, meanwhile, smiled. The smile came Cleaver's way.

Watching it, deep in his heart, the man mellowed. This was the first smile for years that had come his short, stout, fair haired direction, except those that veiled a sneer.

All was ready, and Walt came in and told him. Cleaver's terror, for some strange reason, was fading.

"If you c-c-care to clean up while we're c-c-cooking, ma'am," he said, "we'll do our best to f-f-fake up a meal. You m-m-must be tired. Let me c-c-carry the baby."

The woman scooped the child up, and shot a look of superb disdain at Cleaver.

"You carry the byby? Not 'awf! You'd scare the little runt to death."

"*Scare* him?"

Cleaver howled. Could he scare anything?

That night and the next day were Inferno, for the woman was active as a woman sized flea. Why she could not face the seven day coach journey was a puzzle never solved. It certainly was not the child. He was as healthy and husky a boy as ever a mother owned.

Though the fort and Walt had scoffed at additional ammunition and arms, a woman on the place made a difference. Two Lee Metford rifles came over, and cartridges enough for a small war. And that night, though alone he would have

jeered at it, Walt took his turn as sentry without a murmur.

"The sweet lady can kiss a crocodile by mistake, if she likes," he had said, when he was called for his stint, "but if the kid has to kiss any angels, it won't be through a Kaffir. Not if this lad and a gun can stop it."

Long ere dawn the woman was stirring, and Cleaver, doing his trick, heard her. The child still slept. Her heavy steps soon proclaimed her approach, and he made a quick dodge into the entrance to his hut. The self-imposed sentry duty was a secret.

The woman came noisily out and made straight for where he stood. Boldly she entered. There was no use trying to hide.

" 'Ey!" she called, before the dim light showed him. "Either of you lullaby lovers got a gun? I'm goin' aht to shoot a buck. No corned willie for breakfast for this lydy."

Cleaver stepped toward her, and she jumped and let out an "Aough"! Next instant she had recaptured her composure.

"I want a gun," she said, and made a grab for the rifle. "What right 'ave *you* got wiv grown men's toys? 'Ere, come on. 'And it over!"

Cleaver jerked the rifle away.

"You l-l-leave the rifle alone," he admonished. "Y-y-you'll hurt yourself with it."

The woman seized the rifle.

" 'Urt meself?" She snapped open the magazine to see how many cartridges it contained. "This chicken won't 'urt 'erself; not 'er, but Gawd 'elp the thing she wants to 'urt."

"B-b-but there are l-l-lurking K-k-kaffirs stealing about the veld," Cleaver objected, and in his mind saw a terrible picture. "A w-w-woman isn't safe. I know. You kn-n-now how bad the rebellion is, or you wou-wou-wouldn't have tried to ride out of it. If anything happens to you they'll b-b-blame me."

" 'Appens? Blyme you?" she flaunted. "Blyme you? Nobody never myde you my keeper."

Then she was gone.

The swift dawn came, and Cleaver heard a tiny wailing. Blushing, the man tiptoed into the woman's hut, then reversed and went back to Walt.

"Walt," he said, "g-g-get up a minute. There's a p-p-picture on a st-t-tretcher in that woman's hut. C-c-come and have a l-l-look at it. What shall we d-d-do with it?"

Walt, yawning, yet wearing a mischievous grin, sat up.

"Feed the blooming thing, I suppose."

The two stood looking down at the child, and the tiny wail vanished to nowhere. Two big brown eyes in a curly head stared, unfrightened, up at the pair. Small arms fought from beneath the blankets, and held themselves aloft to be taken.

Feeling very foolish, Cleaver stooped over and lifted the child. For a few seconds he held the small boy in his arms.

"You've g-g-got to be patient, kiddie," he whispered. "Your m-m-ma's got an idea she's a s-s-second Diana, but she'll be back empty and hungry pretty soon. B-b-breakfast won't be long."

As if relieved of a great weight, he lowered the baby.

"T-t-try to sleep another hour, sonny," he murmured. "You d-d-don't come under the heading 'How to feed mules'."

A second hour passed, and the waiting child was fretting. Cleaver wandered into the hut. On the packing case dressing table was the baby's clothing. He coaxed the boy into a smile, then sorted them over. As he fixed each thing he grinned like a self-conscious schoolgirl. Walt, at the fire, to the amazement of Kaffir amateur cooks, was warming canned milk —to his untutored mind tinned milk was better for babies if 'hetted up' a bit.

Soon two unskilled men with a too large spoon were feeding a baby hard biscuits sopped in milk. But the baby only smiled.

Finished, and balancing himself like a very pompous man, the tot got to his feet. When his mother returned with a small *steenbok*, opened and drawn as a

regular hunter would do it, slung over her shoulder, two doting men were enjoying the child's antics.

The woman stepped across the yard, and there was no greeting smile on her face. As the *steenbok* slid to the ground, she turned and pointed whence she had come.

"Don't like it," she said soberly, as one who knew whereof she spoke. "There are three Kaffir shields 'angin' on a 'igh tree on a rise abaht two miles back from 'ere. Trouble's comin'. Those shields carry a message to other *impis*—or I'm a Greek."

SOMETHING soughed into the mud wall at the end of the store, and dust and loose mud trickled. Things spattered against the wall in various places, but those things *whe-e-ed* on through. A foot of the end of a blade stuck out, and the woman forced it down.

The woman pounded a fresh loophole, then for a moment stood and, in the limpid moonlight, scanned the vista outside. Her rifle came to her shoulder, but did not stick out through the hole she had made.

"Tyke that, you blighter!" she muttered.

The rifle cracked, and from other walls of the store shots crackled. A man made a sobbing curse, then followed it with another.

"The fort's getting it pretty hot now," he said. "Can you hear that popping, Cleaver? I expect they're missing the help of the four of us here now."

"Hurt, Fred?" Cleaver asked, in a voice that shivered.

He fired before he attended the answer.

"Hurt, Fred? I th-th-thought I noticed you wince."

The mounted policeman, who had been lent with the other three as extra guard after the woman's report, lied, and bent down the blade of the throwing *assagai* sticking through the wall before him.

"No, Cleaver. Just vigorously cussing a bad shot."

The woman fired twice more, then called without turning her head.

"Walt an' a couple of you fellows come 'ere," she said. "The rest of you line the wall be'ind the 'orses. They'll charge in a minute. Be quick! Don't let your guns stick far ahtside."

The men knew the woman already; her brazenness from the moment she had stepped off the coach indicated a complete ignorance of fear. Through cracks and crevices alongside her they, too, examined the scene. It was no art gallery picture just then. For a hundred yards in every direction the ground was cleared and open, but beyond that was thick bush. Every bush, so innocently still, harbored a naked savage.

The men guessed as the woman did. The shadows in the bush were thickening —in a scant few seconds a rush. A struggle for all to hold that end, while the main body of attackers broke down the wall that held the horses, killed or stampeded them, then slaughtered the white survivors from the rear. It was all but a matter of minutes; the natives were a hundred to one.

Of a sudden the dark bush cleared. Crouching, heads low behind shields, the outlaw *impi* came on.

The woman, standing back from the wall, fired steadily. The three beside her did not waste a bullet. Throwing *assagais* hurled, then stabbing *assagais* raised, the screaming crowd came on. Seven or eight threw up their hands and crashed, but the rest did not notice them, or break.

One of the horses gave a plaintive scream, which echoed over the ringing shots. The others reared and strained at their short halter ropes. Padding feet were all round the store, and at any instant the flimsy doors might shatter.

In a tiny lull in the firing the woman's calm voice was heard.

"Keep your rifles awye from the port-'oles. If they crawl under an' grab 'em we're done."

Then a bullet put out the only candle.

Uncannily, the sounds outside stopped, and muttering voices cropped up. The

besieged but fired the faster. Then, like a flash, the whole visible force turned tail, and in a trice the bush had regained its shadows.

The beleagered band slackened its fire, and one man produced matches and relighted the candle. Doubled up on the floor, the policeman who had winced was holding his chest. Through the eery stillness came the echo of increased rifle fire in the distance. No dozen or so defenders in the fort could manage such an incessant fusillade.

Cleaver, ash gray, with one hand holding to the counter, stared down at the wounded man.

"Th-th-that's the end of the f-f-fort, Fred," he almost sobbed. "T-t-too many of the natives have rifles. I wish to G-g-god these devils here hadn't so many guns."

The woman took a quick look over her shoulder.

"Guns?" she said bitingly. "Some of their guns seem myde of rawgs an' jam pots; some of 'em are suicide machines, sold to 'em by you crooked tryders."

"C-c-crooked traders—"

A tortured scream from the end of the store and the thud of a falling horse finished Cleaver's protest for them.

The baby, hidden beneath the counter, wailed, and the woman dodged over to him. With one eye on the infant and the other on the wall, for a moment she soothed it. Cleaver, by the dying man, was pouring brandy down his throat. But for fear of himself and fear of the scantiness of his knowledge of surgery, he might have staunched the wound.

The woman, stroking the baby, touched the center of his forehead with a finger and made a suggestive motion. Her voice was pitifully determined.

"It'll be dyelight in anuvver 'awf hour," she said to Cleaver. "Dawn's comin' up awready. They'll rush us then in earnest. They'll never get *'im* alive, though, an' no Gawd'll blyme me for doin' it."

Sick unto collapse, Cleaver's shaking hand spilled the brandy.

"It w-w-would almost be m-m-merciful to m-m-make sure now."

The wounded man slewed sidewise, unconscious, and the woman and storekeeper went back to their wall. Faint streaks of light edged the horizon and struggled with the waning moon. An occasional bullet hit the building, while over at the fort pandemonium still appeared to hold sway. The woman fired a single, careful shot, then excitedly called to the others.

"Come 'ere! Come 'ere!" she shouted. "The blighters are runnin' awye!"

WALT, the police and Cleaver crowded round and peered through the loopholes. In the mixed light, hordes of natives could be seen, dodging from bush to protecting bush. The Kaffirs, sure enough, were in frenzied retreat.

The woman's rifle again came up and, with murderous calm, she went on firing.

"Mye as well shoo 'em awye properly," she commented, as a Kaffir clutched at nothing and crashed. "Shootin' carrion eyn't wystin' lead."

Then, once more, the baby wailed.

The mother's eyes came round, and with them the eyes of the others. There must be something there to terrify the child. For an instant they stared in question, then their attention was drawn to the flimsy grass roof. There was little more to know. From above it came a swiftly growing crackling, from beneath, furtive wisps of smoke. Out past the wall beside which the horses now were struggling, was a medley of cruel voices.

The woman looked again at the child. She did not speak.

With a jump every man was at the abandoned wall. One glimpse through the loopholes told the tale. The ruse of the natives' wild retreat had been successful. While they had been watching the withdrawal of the attackers, other savages had sneaked up and fired the dry, tindery place. Now the supposedly beaten Kaffirs were coming back, exulting.

For a second, men and woman looked

blankly at one another. Once the woman cursed. Then, with set lips, she swerved back to her wall, and the first of the oncomers knew it.

A policeman picked up the bottle of brandy and poured himself a stiff drink; the boy, white and shaking, followed suit. Swaying on his feet, Cleaver reached a shelf and brought down a large metal flask. Trembling till he spilled as much as he saved, he filled the flask and put it into his hip pocket. Scarcely above his breath, almost unintelligibly, he spoke.

"W-w-we'll never g-g-get out of here but if we d-d-do, some man who's s-s-suffering hell may need that.

"Hell!" he squealed loudly, and dropped the empty bottle, smashed in his hand.

From all sides the Kaffirs came on, the peaceful air torn with their cries. Every bush and tree and rise spewed Kaffirs. Some recklessly fired old guns and muskets, some waited with *assagais* poised. Steadily, till the barrel was hot past touching, the woman fired cartridge after cartridge, and never a shot went wild. From wall to wall the men raced, and poured concerted volleys—the presence of greater numbers was a thing they knew they must impress. More than a score of natives went out ere half way to the building, but still the massed survivors crowded round.

The wisps of smoke drifted lower, and soon the men were coughing. One man, the corner of a handkerchief between his teeth, bound a bleeding arm. A limping policeman staggered against the woman, then pretended it was carelessness and expressed a labored regret. The flames on the eaves of the roof licked under and came in. Then a horse squealed and broke its halter.

The frightened animal backed into the store, and a man ran to check it. Where the animal had stood, the wall was wrecked. The growing light outside showed a huddle of men close about, and the glint of moving *assagais*.

The woman rushed down and, with the men, blazed into the opening. For the moment the natives broke and ran. Then the other horses were loosed, and crushed into the store.

The woman laid her rifle on the counter and stooped over the baby. Just once she kissed him, then straightened.

"Goodby, you fellows," she said very quietly. "It's my fault you 'ave to be 'ere. I'm sorry. I should 'ave gone on wiv the coach."

A damp hand seized her own, and she felt it was the boy—Walt. A sound of slipping bolts at the moment came from a door.

"Hold on," the boy comforted. "Don't be too hasty. We're not done for yet. Brown, here, says that I'm to ride and take you with me, and Jackson will carry the baby. We'll make a dash to get through them, and chance getting into the fort. The rest will cover us as we go. Leave your rifle where it is—throw away the breech block first—and get out your revolver."

The woman stood perfectly still.

"No, I won't be separyted from the byby. Only one of us mye get killed. I'll stye 'ere where 'e is."

A man came through the smoke and caught the woman by the arm. The hand, too obviously, shook like a wind blown leaf. An *assagai* struck and shivered in the counter inches away.

"G-g-get along!" Cleaver ordered, and his terror created stutter was more pitiful than ever. "H-h-hurry! I'm g-g-going to take the baby. They'll never get *him* alive."

For an instant the woman hesitated, and made to bend again.

"But—"

"Hurry!"

Cleaver pushed her away. For the first time in years he did not stutter.

"Move! Do as I tell you! I'm responsible! You called me coach agent—once!"

The boy, though quaking in his shoes, yet was flippant.

"Let Jackson do it, Cleaver. You'll only drop the kid and run."

TERRIFIED by the smoke and flames, the horses were almost unmanageable. The torn dry wall where they had been tied was a blazing sheet. The back door of the store was burning, the posts and door at the front starting to catch. But a few square yards of the walls were untouched, and through those the police were firing.

The horses had been kept ready saddled, and the boy was doing his best to control them. With the butt of his rifle Cleaver beat down the doorposts, making a bigger gap. As sparks rose the animals again became frenzied, and the getting of them out loomed as a fierce task.

The attack had completely ceased, but from behind trees and rocks, heads now and then took a cautious survey. Vicious protruding *assagai* points proclaimed that the enemy was no less.

Cleaver laid down his rifle and felt for a roll of limbo. Bandages of the trade linen were fastened over the eyes of the two horses with difficulty. Squealing and plunging, they were led out. Not a shot or howl greeted them.

The woman, forced to the ruined door for air, stood holding the child. Her pert little face was ashen, and the baby softly sobbed. The hand which went round the little one grasped the revolver longingly. The policemen, now with their horses, nervous and ready in the open, kept up a fire at any threatening spot.

Cleaver did not wait upon ceremony, but rudely snatched the child.

"G-g-get up along with Walt, missis," he said, though a policeman already had hold of her and was helping her. "Walt, y-y-you swing round for the drift into the river, and t-t-try to g-g-get over the hill. D-d-don't look about for me. It's every m-m-man for himself. If they g-g-get her you know what to do with her."

The woman, momentarily oblivious of the danger ahead of her, extended a hand for a final touch of the baby, but Cleaver, mumbling stupidly, was in his saddle.

"L-l-let's go!" he managed to say.

The shivering horses jumped into a gallop, and for fifty yards the going was clear. The police, riding close behind them, kept up a protecting fire. Almost to the line of bush—then, as by magic, the ground became alive.

Screaming natives sprang to their feet and barred the way. *Assagais* threatened; heavy *knobkerries* and axes swung, and feather head-dresses were thick as the tortured bush itself. The Kaffirs stood so many that their oxhide shields formed a wall.

The time was too short for thought, but the charging riders unconsciously sensed it all. The Kaffirs meant to take them alive, and that was ten thousand deaths in one. Mechanically Cleaver and Walt were using their revolvers; the woman was shooting slowly, with brutal care.

The swarming natives were round them; hands clutched and tore at their reins. A Kaffir gripped Walt's leg and, as the boy sagged sidewise, the woman's revolver exploded against the hideous head. An *assagai* glanced along the horse's shoulder and tore through the woman's dress. Then a man who was clinging to her sagged and, spitting, fell.

Cleaver's horse was held up completely; he fought to release the reins. A man lunged for the baby, but Cleaver's boot crashed into his face. Then the mob closed like a sea around him.

A native was up behind him; his arms encircled him like a python. A hand roughly caught the child. Dropping the reins, Cleaver sought to fire over his shoulder, praying for one last cartridge. Then the baby squealed.

A shot snapped yards away, and the gripping arm relaxed. The native slid off the horse, and Cleaver guessed who had sent the bullet. He noticed the surging mob had thinned; a moment more and his horse had bolted ahead. Next instant he was fleeing alone. From afar a medley of rattling shots struck his dull ears. He hardly could analyze their meaning. Dazed, he turned his head, but his eyes were blinded by tears.

An *assagai* struck the horse from

behind, and the animal snorted and raced ahead still more madly. With the hand that held the revolver, Cleaver sought to turn him in the direction of the shots, but the beast tore straight ahead. In the rear, between him and the shots, there was a padding of feet, and he surmised he was being driven before some unaccountable rout. Spears threw up sand before him; bullets droned by his ears—and his mount was out of control.

For more than a mile the crazed beast galloped. The rattle of shots behind became remote, but the padding feet continued. On the thin air were grunts and wheezes and an occasional angry scream.

A slight rise was before him, and Cleaver drew his shirt sleeve across his eyes and looked back. The bush and veld were swarming with natives, all surging his way. The rise where the shots had echoed was far back, the men there, mere dots. Before him were the towering rocks at the foot of the Matoppos. The end was certain—the old scene would be repeated—he was hopelessly cut off.

The horse began to flag. Suddenly a skulking native rose out of the tall grass. A whizzing *knobkerrie* struck the horse on the nose, and the man rushed forward to grab him. With a snort the animal lunged, then shot aside.

Along the face of the routed Kaffirs the frantic horse careered. Sweat streaked from him. The baby wailed unceasingly and Cleaver swayed in the saddle.

A bullet struck the horse and blood blew back from its neck. The beast stumbled to a stop and Cleaver managed to swing clear as it fell.

THE REVOLVER had slipped from his hand and he hastily snatched it up. His cartridges had spilled, but three of them could be seen in the grass. The close danger forbade a search for more. With an arm round the baby he ran, reloading as he went.

The grass was as high as his head, the straggling bush topping it. He plunged on toward the foot of the hills. In holes, or behind rocks on those hills, might be a haven. But the Kaffirs would see him as he climbed.

In an open patch the grass parted close after him, and a sweating native made a rush. Bare feet came within yards of him, and he jumped at an angle. A throwing *assagai* passed between his legs and almost tripped him. Wheeling, he took a desperate shot, and the Kaffir dropped.

The massive rocks were but a hundred yards away. Could he but find some hole or crevice the improbable might happen, for beaten men surely would not carry vengeance high on rocks, where they were targets.

But a few more steps to go—then a native dashed across him. Cleaver shot straight out, and the child, screaming, flung away from him. The native grasped the infant's dress and swung it up. A wild shot from the ground sent him hurtling.

Cleaver staggered up the hill, dodging wildly from rock to rock. Vegetation was almost non-existent; as he glanced to the plain below, it seemed alive, as with black ants. Two or three *assagais* struck near him, but the twisting man was a poor target.

A crevice appeared in the rocks before him. On the edge of a break were loose rocks, the crevice itself almost too small for passage.

On his knees, Cleaver sought to enter, then reversed and, hugging the baby with his left arm, tried feet foremost. He succeeded in working his way in by heroic effort.

He slipped down a steep incline. The way was fairly smooth; the surface did not tear his flesh. He was beginning to breathe easier when suddenly, a boulder, by which he was worming his way, slipped, and knocked him sidewise. His back struck the ground with a thud which drove the wind from his lungs. The child, screaming, jerked away.

Then a cool breeze seemed to strike him. Half crying, he gradually lost consciousness.

As from a dream Cleaver came to himself. The place where the boulder had wrenched free had left a bigger gap, and the crevice he was in was light. A feeble, pleading cry brought him to full wakefulness, and he turned quickly. Unconsciousness again swept over him.

Once more he came to himself, and his body was in a torment. Raising his head, he looked to his feet, where the torment appeared to have origin. Gingerly he flexed his right foot, and that foot moved about freely, then as gingerly he sought to flex the left.

Cleaver let out a cry. Clenching his teeth, he stared at the rocks above him, and his face ran icy sweat. Outside the world was silent—fearful death had passed—inside had come a ghastly, lingering climax.

His left leg, he knew, was broken clean above the ankle; his foot was clamped beneath a mass of rock which was wedged tightly. The stone must weigh more than a ton. He was a helpless prisoner.

The man lay perfectly still, and the crying baby came to him. Catching his breath as he did it, he took the child's hands and sought to comfort him.

"It's all right, s-s-sonny," he said, and a pounding in his chest made him wince. "W-w-we'll be out of here in a minute. W-w-we're just p-p-playing hide and seek."

The child's pale face brightened, and the courses of the tears dried. As a comrade he tried to snuggle up to the man, but the man only sucked his breath and winced.

TENDERLY, Cleaver pushed the boy aside, and painfully managed to sit up. Leaning forward, he tested the weight of the stone with his fingers, then unfastened one legging so far as he could. Gritting his teeth, he felt the cracked leg, then gaged the extent of the break by a slight twist. Gasping, he fell back. He lay thinking—the hardest thoughts of his life.

The baby called again and he soothed him, then felt round for his revolver. Though knowing what he would find, he broke it.

One single cartridge? And there were two of them. Which of them? It could be but one! Which? Sick till the sweat dripped from his ears, he cast the revolver away. One must face starvation—and he must be the one!

Turning his head, Cleaver looked to the wall where he had slid in. For a man it was an easy climb, but impossible for a baby. And, even should any of the others have escaped and sent out a searching party, no baby's voice could be heard outside. Could he but get him into the open where searchers at least might see him . . . But a skulking Kaffir might find him first . . . Surely the coach road must be near?

Then the child, hungering for company, blundered over his leg and Cleaver lost consciousness.

Hours later he came to, with the baby sobbing quietly and cuddling against him. His lips were parched and his tongue like leather. A gulp of the half warm brandy, and his blood resumed its course.

"Some fellow suffering hell may need it," he had said.

For an hour Cleaver lay thinking, and the baby whined for food. Nothing had passed its lips for many hours. Once more the man reached for the revolver and, puzzling and contemplating, pointed it at the boy.

No, he could not do that. Could not face it.

Another gulp of brandy and Cleaver eased himself up. The break in the leg was swelling. In his subconscious mind was the faint recollection of his study of surgery—he might use the slight knowledge gained and live till his task was done. He had to go soon.

Operate on himself? Why not? Animals did it. Was he not an animal, after all?

Half crazy, the man drew off his shirt and tore it into strips. Cruelly he tied them below his knee and, with the metal sheath of his hunting knife, made a

tourniquet. Gasping, sobbing, he fell inert, and for a while lay stupefied.

He drained off half the flask; then he sliced a strip from his legging. Sharpening the knife on the rock which held him, he made ready.

The depth of the fall and weight of the rock had pulled the broken bones apart, and steel nerves were necessary. The brandy had mounted to his head, but the pain was none the less. Fiercely chewing the strip off the legging, he felt for the spot to cut. Afraid to watch, he closed his eyes.

A PLAINTIVE cry struck his ear, and he wearily came to himself. The baby had been sleeping from sheer exhaustion, but now was hugging against him and striving to make him speak. Cleaver softly touched the child and tried to comfort him.

"N-n-not much longer, sonny. I d-d-don't know if I'll ever m-m-move from here, but if I c-c-can, it'll all be right. Are you g-g-game?"

The baby's big eyes questioned wistfully, and the man gently moved himself. The leg above the knee seemed bursting, the leg below as though not there. Reaching for the brandy, he slaked his mouth, then turned over so as to crawl. For a single hellish second he fought to see whether it could be done.

"Perhaps," he whispered, after a while. "If I d-d-don't faint and fall back."

On one foot, groaning with every breath, Cleaver raised himself against the wall. The earth outside was a little above his head. With the revolver and flask back in their places, he reached down for the baby.

"C-c-come on, sonny," he coaxed. "We'd b-b-better face it now before I ev-v-ventually go under."

Weakly he felt for a hold, then levered himself as far as he could. Exerting every ounce of strength he could command, he lifted the boy above him, and laid him on the rocks outside. Then he drew himself up bit by bit . . . The youngster nestled close to him and quietly slept.

The fresh air pulled him round, and Cleaver sat up. He and his charge were on a tiny plateau, another line of hills a few hundred yards away. Past the hills was a small strip of the coach road, a curve between belts of trees. The up-coach may not have gone—a coach might pass! With a fire he might attract it.

Cleaver peered about for wood. Twigs, stunted bush and dead grass were within reach, and he pulled himself along, collecting what he could. A miniature fire soon was blazing. In a sickly trance he tended it, keeping a dull eye on the road.

Afternoon had come. Cleaver, dozing, shot to wakefulness. Along the valley between the hills was creeping a small band of natives, looking about them as though hunting, or fearing surprise. Choking, Cleaver watched them for an instant, then turned to scatter the smoldering fire.

A shout rose from below and an excited Kaffir pointed. Every man in the party stared up, and a dozen pairs of vindictive eyes gleamed hatred. One shook a broad bladed *assagai*, and howled a vile threat. Then, easy as *klipspringers*, they commenced to climb.

Cleaver crawled till his back was against the rocks. The hideous scene of years before was about to repeat itself. There was no escaping it now. Soon the natives were half way up; then Cleaver came to business.

He jerked the revolver from its holster. The baby still was sleeping, and he held it close to him. Once more he shut his eyes. There was no other way. It had to be.

A yell came from the road—a long drawn "Ek-wa-a-ah! Ek-wa-a-ah"! The gun sagged and brushed the child's cheek, but Cleaver still clung to it. The natives were fifty feet away—in a moment more would be in striking distance. Then again sounded the long "Ek-wa-a-ah"!

Round the edge of one of the belts of trees came the heads of mules. Behind them was a coach and a guard of police.

Cleaver opened his mouth to shout, but

his dry tongue refused to function. Forgetting himself, he tried to stand. The dry tongue acted then—he screamed and the revolver clattered to the ground, beyond reach. The single cartridge wasted!

The Kaffirs were looking back in confusion. The coach had stopped and the police were searching the hills. A native threw one vicious *assagai* then, not waiting to see its effect, bounded away as the rest of the crowd turned tail. Bullets spattered on the rocks as they ran, and two of them fell.

Suddenly it all seemed funny to Cleaver—a fantastic dream. Gradually a film grew over the picture; a shutter slid down. By degrees Cleaver lost consciousness.

Tired—very tired—he sagged over to the baby.

Police stood over the man, and one lifted his head. There was little call for inquiry, for all knew the man who was given up for dead. One pointed to where a foot had been.

"Cleaver?" he said. "Look what the devils did to him, Jack! God! if they'd only done the rest?"

A policeman raised Cleaver very carefully and put a flask to his lips. The sergeant, looking at the wound, was doing some thinking.

Slowly he scanned the rocks from where he stood. His inspection drew him to a nearby crevice. Inquisitive, he lighted a match and dropped it into the cavity. Then he lowered himself into the hole. Another match, and he stood back aghast.

IN A WHEEL chair on a platform a man was sitting, very unhappily. All about him were beaming faces, and the faces were turned his way. There was something wrong about it all, he was certain. He did not feel at home. He could walk, if they would only let him, even if he did still have to use crutches. They were saying such darned foolish things, too. It took courage to listen to such stuff.

Close to him was sitting a lady—some woman who wore a kind of fixed lorgnette. Why did people wear blinkers like those? She seemed nice, though, even if she did look unusually odd.

A tall gentleman had made a queer speech—had told of some sort of bravery, then the silly beggars in front had stood up and clapped their hands. Blooming idiots! It all was a farce. And now another man was talking.

". . . for such acts of courage and self-sacrifice as this, no ordinary medal can suffice. This man's deed stands out alone. The combination, to any one not knowing the circumstances, is strange, but the women and mounted police of South Africa have joined together to have this medal designed and cast. Lady Lawlor will present the medal, then Gerald Cleaver, the bravest man in Africa, will say a few words."

Lady Lawlor? Bravest man? He speak?

Cleaver looked once more at the smiling bespectacled lady, then looked behind him toward a door. The lady was rising, coming his way. Lady Lawlor! Goodnight!

Beaming straight at him, she stood before him. In her hand was some round gold thing.

Cleaver's hands gripped the wheels of his chair, and the chair commenced to turn. The ghost of cowardice that had haunted was gone, but this kind of thing took more than nerve. Bravery—just doing what any man would do? Piffle! He must get out. All this performance over such a little thing was preposterous.

Several near him rose and made to straighten him, but his struggles to steer the chair toward the door did not cease. Another calculating glimpse of the lady, and he made an attempt to stand.

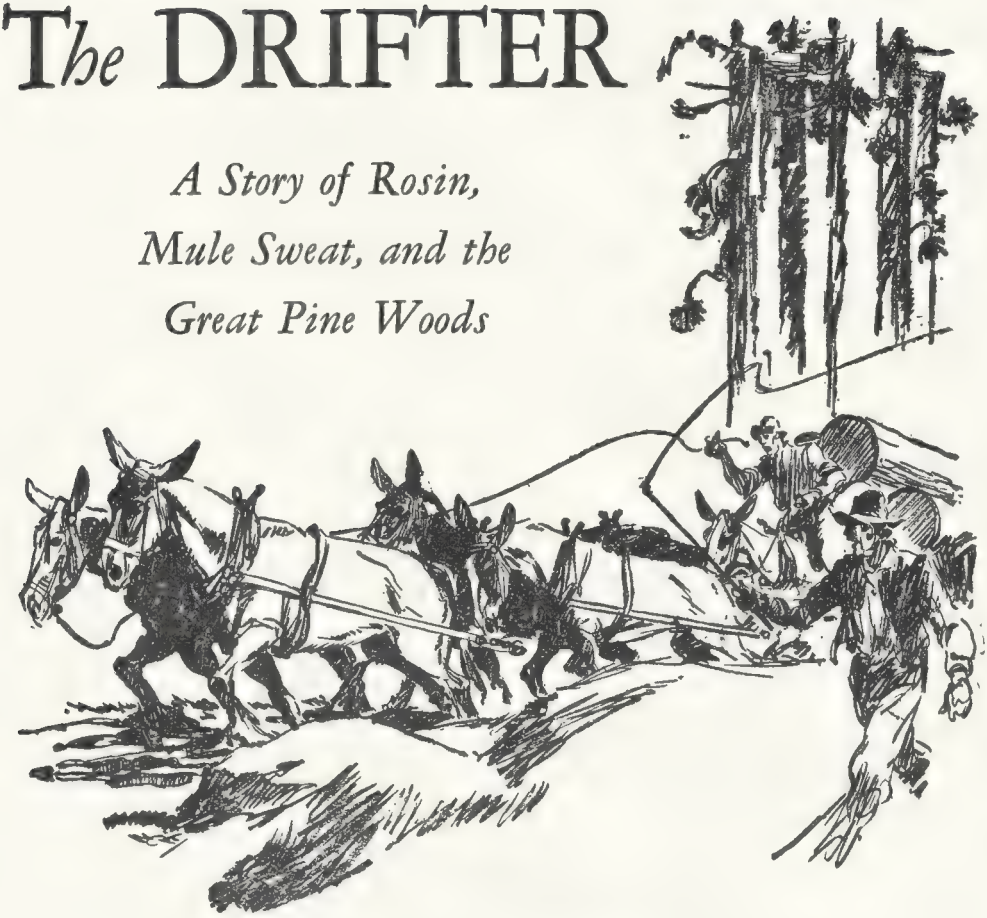
"What's the matter, Mr. Cleaver? Anything you wish?"

Once more he looked to the lady of spectacles, and pent-up amusement was there. One mischievous look. That was enough.

"Darn it, yes," he laughed, at last. "I do wish—I wish I could run!"

The DRIFTER

A Story of Rosin, Mule Sweat, and the Great Pine Woods



By HOWARD ELLIS DAVIS

ALTHOUGH a pretty sound sleeper, I came wide awake at once an' knowed that somebody was foolin' with my clothes, which I had put on a chair within a foot or so of my cot. Then my britches was carelessly dropped. I knowed it was my britches by the plunk of the heavy knife in the pocket agin the board floor of the tent.

While I was a-layin' there tryin' to make up my mind whether to let out a yell or git into action, or to do both at the same time, a match flared, lightin' up the face of Buck Heely, the foreman, who bunked across the tent from me. I knowed then it had been Buck, lookin' for a match. He smokes cigarits made from pipe tobacco. Although they goes out constant, he never has a match of his own.

I heard the creak of his cot as he set down on its edge, an' could see the spark of his cigarit end. Jest as I was dozin' off once mo', a chair fell over an' I opened my eyes with a start to see Buck, in his underclothes, standin' at the flap of the tent, lookin' out into the night.

"Buck," I says, "why in hell can't you stay in bed, stid of wanderin' 'round in the night, knockin' over furnichure an' wakin' up yo' betters? Ef I'd knowed what a somnambulatin' fool you was, I'd

have gone out an' bedded down with the mules, 'fo' I'd have agreed to share a tent with you."

"What's a somnam—whatever it is?" he asks, 'thout turnin' his head.

"It's one of these here fools what wanders about in the night, when sensible folks is in bed," I answers him.

"Listen at that rain," he says, mournful as a hound a-howlin'.

The spring rain was softly thumpin' agin the tent an' drippin' off at the edges. It was a sound that to some would have been soothin' an' sleep producin'; but to a loggin' outfit, 'specially when the ground in the woods is already rotten, there is no sound mo' onsettlin'. It was no wonder Buck was restless in his slumbers. But he was takin' his responsibilities too much to heart.

We was camped up the river a few miles above where the Tri-State Construction Company, whose main offices is down in the city, was buildin' a big water-power dam. We had a portable sawmill, with a boiler on wheels an' a small engine settin' on top of it like a wart on a fat man's nose. But the little outfit was a humdinger, an' we was rigged to cut sixty foot stuff. Our main job was to git out special order timbers, sich as eight by sixteens for trestle work an' ten by tens an' twelve by twelves for cribbin'. It was all quick action stuff an' some of it was long an' hard to git; but we hadn't fell down yet.

The super, Mr. Tom Elan, most often would come up himself with a list of what they needed down there at the dam. I think he liked to git away every now an' so often from that there ant hill activity about the works. He'd come ridin' up through the woods on a black hoss an' hand Buck the list.

"Buck, here's somethin' we want pronto quick."

"When will you need it, boss?"

"Day befo' yesterday." An' he'd grin.

"The trucks will begin' bringin' it in tomorrow, ef we hairlips the whole damn' county!" Buck would reply.

Then we'd go into action.

Our present job was to git out a bunch of logs for the coffer dam on the east side. Buck had shut down the mill an', in addition to the regular sawyers, had put the mill crew, who was trained to do anything, to sawin' logs. We was opiratin' in a half section of timber that had been helt back for the purpose. It was in the forks of two good roads. Buck had set up some ramps on the roads. We was puttin' the logs out on the ramps with the drays, an' there a string of trucks got 'em an' hauled 'em down to the dam.

You know how one of these here coffer dams is rigged up. A crib of logs, drifted together, is set down in the river an' filled with earth an' rock. A string of these here earth filled cribs starts at the bank, swings out in the river a piece, then curves back into the bank, above or below the startin' pint. Then the water in the enclosed space is pumped out, so that foundation work for the dam can be carried on right in the old bed of the river. We was gittin' out the logs for the cribs.

We had a fair lead to start with an' hadn't looked for no trouble in keepin' ahead of the game. The haul out to the road was easy, an' we kept the ramps filled for the trucks, which was puttin' the logs to the dam faster'n they was usin' 'em. Then these here rains sot in a' we soon jumped trouble.

AS THE ground begin to git rotten our opirations slowed up. Lots of places we had to double out with a load. In some spots the drays would go down to the hub an' it would be necessary to unload an' snake the logs to a firmer place an' reload. The ramps on the road was beginnin' to stay empty half the time.

I was drivin' what I had considered the best team on the works, ef I do say it myself. My leads was dandies. Old Wiley, my saddle mule, was the best that ever sot four hoofs on the ground. Alex, the off-wheel, was the stoutest in the bunch. But now that we was gittin' in a pinch, old Alex was beginnin' to go bad on me. I think it was pure contrariness

on his part. Some mules is like some folks. Git you in a tight an' they'll lay down on you. Buck Heely, as I've said befo', was foreman of the outfit, an' a harder driver of men, himself included, I've never seen. The worser behind with the loggin' we got, the mo' desprit he striv.

The same rains that was playin' sich hell with us was raisin' the river. To keep ahead of the water, they put a extry force on the coffer dam work. They put on a night crew. For us, it was sorter like burnin' the candle at both ends. Our headstart of logs at the dam begin to melt away. Buck took to runnin' down in his flivver after quittin' time every evenin', an' lookin' at that diminishin' supply. He lost his relish for grub. He couldn't sleep of nights.

I kept ruminatin' over these things as I lay on my cot, while Buck stood there in his underclothes, lookin' out at the rain.

"Ef he laughs at me today, I'll take a mule whip an' beat him to death!" Buck said, sudden an' fierce.

"Why, who's been laughin' at you?" I says, innocent-like.

"You know who I mean—that old meddler, Dad Peters."

"I ain't never seen him laughin' at you."

"He may not have come right out an' laughed, damn him!" Buck sorter grates 'tween his teeth, as ef implyin' it was a good thing for Dad he hadn't. "But he's laughin' up his sleeve all the time. I kin tell it by the look in his eyes. An' his constant braggin' 'bout what *he* knows 'bout loggin' an' what *he's* done in the loggin' woods, has got to the pint where I'm not a-goin' to stand no mo' of it. Ef it hadn't been for you I'd have run him off 'fo' this."

Dad Peters had drifted into camp a few days befo'. He had come jest 'fo' supper time an' when the ding-dong sounded, had filed in an' set down with the rest of us. After supper he had gone out an' set down on the steps of the mess hall with the boys an' bummed a cigarit from Wes Jones. He was up in the seventies, I reckon, an' looked tired an' forlorn an' sort of washed out. His clothes an' shoes was of good quality, but mighty shabby. His hat was out of shape an' time worn. Terreckly, Buck come by an' says—

"Mister, was you huntin' work?"

"Not exactly," the old feller says. "Jest sort of drifted by. I used to belong to a loggin' outfit myself."

"Where was that?"

"Oh, down the State—Mobile County."

"What'd you do?"

"Everything, sort of, first an' last. Started as a log cutter in the woods. Then filed saws a while, an' was team boss for a spell. Then I was made foreman of the woods. We had twenty teams —an' damn' good ones. Steers in the low places an' mules on the ridges. That was some outfit!"

An' for half an hour the old feller talked an' bragged. As he lived over again them old days, he seemed to forgit how tired he was.

When he had finished a spell of his braggin', Buck says to him:

"Well, mister, I ain't got no twenty teams, nor half that many; but I ain't got no fault to find with my outfit."

"Oh, I wasn't meanin' to th'ow off on *yo'* outfit," the old feller come back at him, humble-like. But I seen then for the first time the twinkle in his eyes what made Buck say afterwards that he was laughin' at him up his sleeve.

"What's yo' name?" Buck asks.

"Peters—jest Dad Peters."

"Well, Dad, you'd better not try to go no farther tonight. I'll tell Sam to fix you up a cot some place."

Dad made Sam, the black cook, put the cot in a vacant shack across from the tent where me an' Buck was sleepin'. The next day, 'stid of driftin' on, like we all thought he'd do, he come over in the woods. As I went by with my team, I seen him pullin' a saw. Later, I seen him settin' on the ground beside the saw filer, who, a groove sawed in the top of a little oak stump to hold his saw, was at work. That evenin', I heard some of the log cutters braggin' on their saws. Seems

Dad had showed the filer a little trick that helped wonderful.

HE HAD been there now for three days, always busy, always meddlin', with a hundred little tricks in the trade to show some feller an easier way to do a thing. He was spry an' cheerful, an' often made a joke of what Buck considered a serious matter. He was always braggin', an' I think he sometimes imagined he was back with his old outfit. We all liked him—even Buck, who, in spite of his fumin', wouldn't have runned Dad off no mo' nor I would. The old feller jest natural taken a holt on you.

Buck left the tent flap an' lit the lamp. Then he set down on his cot agin an' cussed the rain, while I kivered up my head an' went on back to sleep.

When the ding-dong sounded for breakfast, I was all washed up an' ready; but Buck hadn't come out the tent. The ding-dong was a piece of iron, which the blacksmith had bent in the shape of a triangle, hung by a rope jest outside the mess hall do'. Old Sam could play a regular chune on it, an' mo' cheerfuler music I never listened to. But though the rain had stopped, the gang that turned out that mornin' was a mournful lookin' set. We all knowed what was ahead of us.

Buck staggered in when we was half through breakfast, his eyes red, an' lookin' as ef he'd been on a week's bat. He gulped a cup of coffee an' went outside. For once Dad's cheerful braggin' an' jokes failed to raise a laugh.

"Dad," I whispered, as we riz from the table, "lay off of Buck today. He's in a bad frame of mind."

But Dad didn't pay me no heed. Goin' up to Buck, who was standin' with his head hung down, he rared back, hung his thumb in his gallus an' said, cheerful as a cheewee—

"Well, Buck, goin' out for yo' mud bath agin today?"

Buck only raised his eyes an' glared at him.

"What you thinkin' 'bout so hard?" inquires Dad.

"I was thinkin'," says Buck, slow an' sarcastic, " 'bout how to git out of that there bottom below ramp No. 3; an' ef you'd shet yo' damn' fly trap an' git t'hell away from here, maybe I could figger how to do it."

"That's easy," Dad snaps back at him. "Come 'round the pint of the hill, th'ow a dray load of poles in the dip where that little branch runs through, an' take it anti-gardlin' up the holler to the ridge."

"That mought work," Buck replies, sort of grudgin'-like.

"In course it'll work. Roads was always my strong pint. I always had the roads figgered out 'fo' I put my outfit into a piece of new timber. Then when we started—"

"Aw, shet up yo' braggin' 'bout what you used to do," Buck snarls.

"Now ef you had gone into that there piece of coffer dam woods with a pencil an' piece of paper an' made a sketch of—"

Of a sudden, Buck turned on him as ef he'd eat the old feller up plumb whole. But in turnin', he struck his head agin a pole swung in the crotch of a tree to stretch a tent fly, an' it knocked him down. Dad dodged 'round the tent out of sight.

He jined me at the mule lot jest as day was breakin'. When he caught out Alex for me an' led him up to the harness rack, I said to him:

"Dad, you old leather headed fool, didn't I tell you to lay offen Buck. He's in a bad way. He ain't been able to sleep much for two nights, an' he's gittin' worser."

"Ef he'd stay wider awake in the day time, maybe he could sleep of a night," Dad says, chucklin'.

"Buck's all right," I comes back at him.

"Jest takes himself an' his job too serious," he replies.

"Waal," I says, "ef this here proposition we're into now ain't serious, then I don't know the meanin' of the word."

"Life is nothin' but a game," he says, "an' ought to be played with a smile on yo' face. A man ought to give a job the best there is in him, but he ought not to

worry. When he gits to worryin', then the job is gittin' the best of him. An' when once a job gits atop of a man, he's in a bad way. Buck ain't in no mental state to 'tend to his business."

"Maybe not," I says.

I turned an' looked him over. The mud for the past three days hadn't done his shabby clothes no good, an' he'd borried a jumper from one of the boys that hung on him like a rag on a bush.

"Maybe not; but ef you had of looked on yo' job a little mo' serious, Dad, maybe you wouldn't have been where you are today."

Without a word, he turned an' walked off through the mud an' manure of the lot to help some of the other boys catch out, an' I was sorry for havin' spoke as I did.

Terreckly, he come back with a raincoat he had borried. Foldin' it, he placed it on my dray for a seat an' rid out in the woods with me. But most of that day he drooped about, thoughtful-like, not takin' much hand in the general activities. I was afraid I had hurt him mortal bad. To make it worse, he run foul of Buck in his most tetcheous place.

The old feller was settin' on a stump with his head bowed as I swung by with the team, an' I called out to him—

"Dad, come help me git a load out the bottom."

I thought when I got him out of sight down there in the hollow, I'd sort of apologize for what I'd said. But I couldn't git the words out, so I says instead:

"You catch for me while I load."

He taken the canthook, as I placed my chain an' brought the leads around, an' as I rolled the bed load on the dray, he'd catch each log with the hook an' place it jest right. He was mighty skilful at that.

"Better go out with what you got," he said terreckly. "The ground is soft here, an' Alex has quit on you. You oughter done what I told you an' out a fresh mule in his place this mornin'."

"The old skunk is jest soldierin'," I says. "Ef he'll only pull, I kin go out with a decent load." An' I snaked up another big log an' rolled it on top of what I already had on the dray.

AS I PLACED my buck-chain over the load, Dad backed off to one side to watch me start. It had begun to shower again, an' the old raincoat he had on kivered him from chin to feet. Of a sudden, he peeled it off an' th'owed it over the collars of my two wheel mules. It's mighty easy to gall 'em, you know, workin' 'em in the rain that way.

Climbin' onto Wiley, I swung my legs an' called to the team. The dray moved up for about twenty foot an' stopped.

"Alex ain't doin' nothin'," Dad yelled at me.

"I know it," I replies. "He ain't even leaned agin the collar."

I called again to the team, an' whacked Alex across the rump with my folded whip. The leads dug in their toes. Wiley strained an' grunted. But that there old off-wheel jest stood there figitin' about on his feet.

"Cut to the right," Dad calls.

I done that. Then, when he had placed a chunk behind the left front wheel, I cut back. In that way the dray moved up a foot or two, an' ef Alex had done his part we would have gone on. But he wasn't doin' nothin'.

Dad had been standin' alongside of Alex, wavin' his arms at him an' beggin' him to pull. Now he says to me—

"Th'ow me yo' whip."

I done as he asked.

"Cut him about the legs," I advised.

Dad done as I told him, while I tried once mo' to git the team in motion. But old Alex only shifted about on his feet. Then, of a sudden, his face gittin' red, Dad lit in on that old mule an' done what I had been itchin' to do for a week. He whaled the livin' tar outen him.

He backed off a few steps to git the swing, an' every time that whip uncurled it left a whelp on Alex big as my finger.

About the third or fourth lick, who

should come walkin' out the bushes behind him but Buck? Buck stopped in astonishmint, his mouth open. Then, walkin' up to Dad, he taken him by the shoulder an' swung him about. Snatchin' the whip outen his hand, he flung it down; then he shaken Dad till his hat fell off.

"You damned old hellion!" he yells. "What do you mean by beatin' one of my mules thataway? Look at the whelps on him. Ef I ever catches a driver with whelps on his mule, I fires him. Now you git t'hell away from here an' don't ever let me catch sight of you again. Git!"

"You're right, Buck," Dad says, humble-like, as he picked up his hat. "Never whelp a mule. I never allowed it in my old outfit. In the first place, it don't do no good. I'm afraid, though, I wasn't thinkin' 'bout the benefit to Alex. I was only consarned in the good it was doin' me. 'Fraid I've growed selfish in my old age. But I apologizes—to you an' Alex." An' that same devilish twinkle was in Dad's eyes as he turned an' walked away.

"Git offen that mule an' lighten yo' load," Buck says to me. "I oughter fire you for p rmittin' sich as this with yo' team. An' ef that old meddler is still hangin' 'round the camp when we git in, I'll be dad blamed, deedaddled damned ef I don't kick him for half a mile down the road."

"Now, Buck," I says, "while acknowledgin' that Dad ought not to've whelped Alex like he did, he was plum' out of patience. An' though he give that old mule the beatin' he deserved, it's Dad's raincoat Alex's a-wearin', while Dad's takin' the rain."

Buck only snorted an' walked off 'thout helpin' me to unload.

I was afraid that, on top of what I had said to him that mornin', Dad would take too much to heart Buck's orderin' him off an' leave. But he didn't. Hung 'round all the mornin' an' gathered in when the grub wagin come out with our dinner buckets. I noticed that Sam had put him in a extry piece of pie, an' Dad chuckled as he taken it out the bucket an' laid it on the grass. He glanced 'round at the rest of us, as ef he'd like to rub it in, the way Sam favored him.

His appetite had improved since he had been with us, an' he cleaned up his vittles. Then he taken a piece of paper that had come wropped 'round somethin', an' with the stub of a pencil begin to draw on it. We left him at it when we went back to work. An' for the balance of that day, he walked 'bout in the woods in the drizzlin' rain with that there paper in his hand.

In course, with the continual rains, the ground was gittin' rottener all the time, an' that day was the worst we'd had. The trucks at the ramps on the roads was standin' most of the time. We come out the woods at quittin' time lookin' like mud turtles, man an' mule. Buck didn't have to go down to the dam to look into the state of things there. The super was a-settin' in his car waitin' for him when we come up on the road with the last load.

"Buck," he says, "when the night crew goes off in the mornin', we'll have enough logs to run us 'bout two hours. Ef you can't manage to speed up yo' opirations, we'll have to stop work on the coffer at noon."

There wasn't no jackin' up nor nothin'. He jest driv' on with them words. But it left Buck a-standin' there in the road as ef he had been mauled over the head with a skid pole. We had to go 'round him with the teams when we had unloaded an' driv' on.

THAT night, he went to bed soon as we got in; but by midnight he was up agin, smokin' an' ramblin' in my pockets for matches. He had lit the lamp on the table for company an' I kivered up my head to shet out the light, though it was hot as all tarnation. An' the rain was a-drummin' on the tent, constant.

Sometime later, I was waked up by the sound of voices. Peepin' over the edge of my kiver, I seen Dad a-settin' on the edge of the cot with Buck.

"Buck," he says, "I want a cigarit."

"Jim's got a package in his pocket, Dad," Buck replies. "I felt 'em there, lookin' for matches. There's his britches on the flo'."

"It must be hard on Jim, bunkin' in the tent with a feller that can't sleep," Dad says, rouchin' in my pocket for the cigarits.

"I reckon so," Buck replies, absent-like.

"The trouble with you, Buck, is you ain't got no sense," Dad remarks, as he struck a match. "You're destroyin' yo' own morale an' that of yo' men."

Buck looked at him questionin', as ef not knowin' prezactly what the old feller was drivin' at.

"Don't you know it's sinnin' agin yo'self an' agin yo' job to worry?" Dad continues.

"I reckon so." Buck sighed. "But I can't help it. I'm jest cut out that way. I ain't yit thirty year old an' I've got gray hairs a-comin' in my head. I don't reckon you've got a thing in the world. Not even the price of a—a cigarit. But I'd be willin' to work for half my wages ef I had yo' disposition."

"Then stop worryin' an' cultivate a disposition of yo' own."

"Stop worryin' hell! I'm nigh crazy with worry. Even you ought to realize, Dad, that I'm fallin' down on my job. That there super picked me up from nothin' an' give me a chance, kase he said he figgered I could always deliver the goods. I told him I'd git them logs ef I hairlipped the whole damn' county. I ain't hairlipped nothin'. I'm a-fallin' down on him."

"In course the weather's been agin you, Buck," Dad says. "But you've worried so an' got into sich a state you're lettin' lots of things git by you that you ought to take advantage of. I've gathered a few notions myself 'bout that there proposition we're up agin. I'm goin' to start them logs to comin' today."

Buck looked at him in astonishmint.

"*You*, Dad?"

"Yes, me. Ef there is one thing that I do know, Buck, it's loggin'."

"To hear you brag, Dad, you know it all. Yo' constant meddlin', an' runnin' foul of yo' notions, has worried me considerable since you been hangin' 'round here. But I knowed you only wanted to help. I reckon maybe you did used to know right considerable 'bout loggin' in the old days."

"In course," Dad replies, modest-like, "I reckon I've done forgot mo' 'bout it than you'll ever know; but I still recollect considerable knowledge of loggin'. Ef you'll let me, I'll start them logs to comin'."

"How would you go 'bout it?" Buck asks.

"Will you let me?"

"In course I will, ef you'll show me that yo' plan will hold water."

"Oh, it'll work. But you must promise to do somethin' for me, ef I git them logs out for you."

"Anything within my power. What you want me to do, give you a job?"

"It's mo' important than that."

"What is it? Anything within my power—I swear it!"

"I want you to set in to cultivate the kind of disposition you said you envied—modesty forbids me to say a disposition like mine. I was older than you are 'fo' I learned it's the nearest approach you'll ever come to that there will-o'-the-wisp they calls happiness."

"But that wouldn't be doin' nothin' for you, Dad."

"It's enough. I have yo' word. You have energy an' loyalty. Git yo' disposition right an' you'll make yo' boss a mighty good man."

"I'll promise, ef you'll tell me how. What's yo' plan 'bout gittin' out them logs?"

Dad pulled the table over to him, an' spread on it the same paper he'd been totin' 'bout with him all the afternoon befo'. Then he looked over at me an' said:

"Jim, stop playin' 'possum an' go catch out yo' team. The log cutters is goin' to meet me in the mess hall in half an hour. Sam's gittin' breakfast ready now."

Grumblin' some 'bout there now bein' two somnambulatin' fools 'stid of one, I nevertheless put on my clothes an' went out.

Dad an' Buck went into the woods with us. Dad had the log cutters saw down two poles thirty foot long, then some shorter stuff for cribbin'. 'Fo' you could say scat, we had a ramp rigged up where the slope run out into the hollow. The poles was laid parallel, 'bout ten foot apart, the small ends on the ground, the front ends cribbed up to a height where the logs on the ramp could be rolled onto the bed of a truck. By takin' advantage of the slope of the ground, the poles was 'bout level. Logs on the ground at the upper end could be rolled down to the front an' the ramp filled with no trouble whatever.

"Dad," I says, light beginnin' to break on me, "you ain't aimin' to bring them trucks down here to load 'em?"

"Yep," he replies.

"Why, ain't you got sense enough to know," I protests, "that they'd never git out with a load? They'd stand an' spin till they buried themselves."

"They can't go out under their own power alone," he explains, patient-like, "but with a pair of leads hooked to the front of 'em they can make it all right. C'on, fellers. Let's go to the next location I got picked out."

WITH a pair of leads, I can handle as many logs as half a dozen men with canthooks, an' almost as skillful. We worked fast an' soon had several mo' of them new ramps ready to fill. Buck left us an' went to meet the other teams as they come into the woods. Already there was a new quality in his voice as he bellered at 'em:

"Drap yo' drays jest off the road, boys. Take the extry stretchers Dad told you to bring, an' rig up yo' team into two snakin' teams. We ain't goin' to put a log on a dray no mo'. We got new ramps down here in the woods an' we're goin' to snake 'em on. The ground bein' soft will make 'em snake all the easier. We'll have ramps in snakin' distance of every patch of timber in this whole scope. Let's go!"

The plan worked so simple that I begin to wonder why I hadn't thought of it myself, even ef I haven't got no great gift for brains, 'cept in handlin' a team. In the first place, by usin' each pair of mules as a snakin' team, we had doubled the number of teams. With the ramps placed like they was, we could snake in logs to 'em as fast as we had been bunchin' 'em to load on a dray. There was a man at each ramp to keep the logs rolled down. Most of the stock was already cut, so we had some of the log cutters drivin' teams. Even old Sam, the cook, leavin' his helper in charge of the kitchen, was handlin' a pair of mules. An' believe me, that old nigger was a plum' artist with them jarheads. You could hear him laughin' all over the woods.

I had been a little jubious in my mind 'bout them truck drivers bein' willin' to come down in the woods after their loads; but they was plum' tickled at the turn of things. They was haulin' at so much a thousand, log scale, an' it's a mighty disheartenin' thing to set waitin' half the time for a load. They wasn't no waitin' now.

The big pneumatic tires didn't cut down so bad. In course every now in so often a truck would stick. But there was always another pair of mules convenient to hook on an' help pull 'em out. Sometimes they went up to the road with six mules in front of 'em.

Buck was everywhere, carryin' a canthook like a bandmaster's swagger stick, ready to th'ow himself into a pinch or straighten out a tangle at a minute's notice. It was a-rainin' most of the time, an' each driver had his raincoat hung over the collars of his mules. Though the water was a-drippin' down my nose, I never enjoyed a day's work mo'. We was whoopin' an' runnin' an' hollerin' like school boys on a picnic. There's nothin' succeeds like success, as I've hearn folks say.

Buck had told us that we all, himself included, was workin' under Dad's orders. The old feller had his eye on the whole opiration an' it was easy to see he was right at home. When he give a direction. he knowed what he was talkin' about, He didn't ask nobody to do mo' than he could, but he kept us all up to the limit. He was kivered with mud an' his clothes was stickin' to him, puttin' me in the mind of a chicken that's fell in the rain barrel.

That night, we was in sich an exhiliratin' frame of mind that we played stud poker till nine o'clock. Dad jined us, as usual. But he kept braggin' so an' tellin' of how he got out of this, that an' the other tight in the old days, that it interfered with the game. He strutted like a dried up little turkey cock. When I turned in, Buck was sleepin' like a baby. I had to pull him off his cot when the first ding-dong sounded the next mornin', an' threaten to pour a bucket of cold water on his head 'fo' I could ever git him wide enough awake to put on his clothes.

We had three days of this, everything an' everybody goin' in high. The super added five hundred mo' logs—twelves, sixteens an' a few twenties—to the first bill; but by fo' o'clock of the third day, we had the last of 'em on the ramps. It would take the trucks all the next day to clean up, an' we would have some mules over there to help 'em out the woods; but the rest of us was through with the opiration. As ef also to celebrate the event, the clouds lifted an' rolled away an' the sun come out.

We all went down to the branch an' taken a good scrub an' put on fresh clothes. Buck an' me chipped in an' loaned Dad a clean outfit, which didn't noways fit him. He borried Buck's razor an' taken a shave. The old feller looked right respectable when he was slicked up, an' I remarked to Buck that, jedgin' by his appearance an' the line of talk he sometimes used, he put one mo' in the mind of a brokedown school teacher than a wore out loggin' man.

THE BOYS was gathered 'bout Dad on the bunkhouse steps, listenin' to him talk of the old days; an' Buck an' me was settin' in the do' of our tent smokin' when the super came ridin' up. Buck groaned an' looked at me an' axed for a match. I couldn't meet his eyes as I give it to him. We had all been dreadin' this. We liked Buck an' we loved Dad, an' we knowed, in all reason, that when the super come up to see us, as he was bound to do, Dad would lay it on so thick as to how he had stepped into the gap an' saved the day, the super couldn't help but know Buck had fell down on his job. That old feller couldn't no mo' help braggin' 'bout his exploits as a loggin' man, than water can help runnin' down hill. I could see the boys fidgitin' as the super drawed up in front of 'em.

"Where's Buck?" he asks, lookin' 'em over.

"He's ambled off somewheres in the woods," Wes Jones lies, lookin' him straight in the eye.

"I jest rid up to thank you boys for the way you shot those logs to us, in spite of all the rain," the super says. "Tell old Buck I say he's a humdinger an' that he's got the best damn' outfit in the state."

"I'll tell him," Wes replies, lookin' sheepish.

Then Dad spoke up, an' I helt my breath to listen. His voice snapped out as I'd never hearn it befo'.

"Mr. Elan," he says to the super, "the loyalty an' energy which Buck puts into his services for you is somethin' to be prized. The way he took advantage of—er—his opportunities to engineer himself out of this tight ought to pave the way for bigger things."

Buck looked at me, cockeyed. Dad was a-givin' him all the credit, 'thout one word of brag on what he had did. Buck was so agitated that his cigarit come to pieces. Then he hopped out in front of the tent.

"Dad Peters is a goldurned liar!" he yells. "I don't deserve one nickel's worth of credit for gittin' them logs to you,

boss. It was him that figgered the thing out. I had come plum' to the end of my rope. It was him that bossed the job. He has forgot mo' 'bout loggin' than I'll ever know, an' he still knows mo' than he's forgot."

But the super wasn't payin' him no mind. He was off his hoss an' standin' befo' Dad.

"Why, Mr. Peters, sir," he says. "I hardly expected to find you up here."

Then, seemin' to sort of grasp the situation, he says to us:

"Boys, evidently you don't know that this is Mr. Peters, manager of construction of the Tri-State Construction Company, my boss's boss. He's built some of the largest hydro-electric dams in this country.

"But what, sir," he adds, again turnin' to Dad, "are you doin' up here?"

"I'm supposed to be takin' a two weeks' rest cure at a certain hotel on the Hudson, in New York State," Dad says. "But nothin' puts the old pep back into me like the smell of rosin an' mule sweat. I broke into activity, you know, doin' jest what these boys are doin' up here in the woods. I've had a mighty good time, though I reckon my meddlin' has bothered Buck some. An' they are all damn' fine listeners. There's nothin' mo' interestin' than talkin' shop to fellers who understand yo' language."

"I'll send the car up at once, sir," says the super, swingin' back on his hoss. "An' the guest house will be ready for you."

"Guest house, hell!" says Dad, grinnin'. "Don't you smell that beef stew Sam's got on the stove? I'll drap in on you some other time. So long."

Dad riz when the super rode off an' went to wash up for supper. Us fellers looked at each other sort of strained an' pop-eyed, an' we talked in whispers. When the ding-dong sounded, we all went in an' set down. Not a word was spoke. Then Dad poured some coffee in his saucer, blowed on it, taken a suck an' begin—

"I remember once my old outfit was up agin a proposition . . ."

The spell was broke. Dad was Dad once mo'. We was ourselves.

After supper, Dad taken down from the joist along the wall the little box of corn we used for chips, an' we played poker as usual. The next mornin' he was gone. Jest sort of slipped off from us, as he'd come.

I'm still drivin' the best damn' team in the outfit, ef I do say it myself. When Christmas rolled 'round, I got a package from Dad containin' a cartoon of cigarits, with a hundred dollar check layin' on top of it. Buck is workin' down at the dam with the super. Dad sent him half a cord of books an' every night, with the super's help, Buck studies 'em an' figgers on paper. When I drapped in at his bunkhouse one night an' axed him what he thought he was a-doin', he said he was learnin' how to be a dam engineer.

"An' here's a rule I'm tryin' to live by," he says. "It come with the books on a piece of paper in Dad's handwritin'. It's harder for me than the book learnin'. I got the lady typewriter up at the office to print it off. The one in Dad's handwritin' is put up with my gold watch an' extry money."

He taken his hat from the flo' an' on the inside of the sweat band was a little strip of paper from which he read these words—

> "This life of ours is all a game,
> A game that's sure worthwhile,
> An' the best damn' players in it
> Are those who *fight* an' *smile*."

"It's the old trade Dad made with me up at camp," he says, "the cultivatin' of a disposition like hisn. It's hard for me to do; but I'll do it. I'll do it," he repeats, hammerin' on the table, "ef I hairlips the whole damn' county!"

EDWARD L. McKENNA

writes a vivid little story of a tabloid photographer

A BREAK *for* BOX CARS

WITH the alert step of the reporter when he is hungry, Joe Hawkes dodged out of the September sunlight into lower Park Row.

T-Bone Hannigan's was his destination, and a hard morning's work with the camera had whetted his appetite. So far, he had been out to Morris Park, in Brooklyn, to get a few pictures of "Pineapples" Enfield, the bride of the wealthy single-taxer; Pineapples, however, was at Long Beach, so he went there from the Jamaica station.

He searched high and low for her without success, but in order that his time shouldn't be wasted completely, he made some snaps of several fair bathers which the *Daily Picture Bulletin* might call "Mermaids Defy Chilly Breezes" or "Last Roses of Summer" according to the taste and fancy of the caption writer.

Great old street, lower Park Row. Joe was very fond of it, as he was fond of Halstead Street and Dearborn Street, and Clark Street, in Chicago, and the thoroughfares leading to the Charlestown Navy Yard in South Boston. Streets full of pawnshops and cheap clothing stores, and tawdry theaters, and penny arcades. Streets that had their seamy bits of history. Streets that whispered of vicious and dangerous hinterlands.

For Joe's interest in vice and crime was more than professional. His favorite book was "Crime and Punishment".

Funny book, he thought to himself; tells you all about how the old lady was murdered in a hundred pages, then takes about a thousand more to refresh your memory about it. Ought to have some of these Russians working for a tabloid. "Disappointed in love, Anna Karenina, a beautiful Yiddish stenographer, threw herself under a Third Avenue train at Chatham Square during the morning rush hour. Northbound traffic was tied up until ten o'clock. A diary by Miss Karenina has been discovered at her address. It will be published in the Blue Edition of the Daily Picture Bulletin (Pictures on Page 1)."

Yes, and Artzybashef, you take Artzybashef, now. Of course, he was a little too much, but boy, didn't he know his stuff! These babies have the right idea. They know what the world is—a madhouse. No rhyme or reason to it, only a lot of grafters and a lot of suckers.

Bang! An arm whacked Joe on the back. He turned quickly, and his left shoulder hunched reflexively to guard his jaw. Joe had had a good few cameras taken away from him in his time, and had escaped with still more.

"Well, old apple knocker! Last time I saw you was—"

"Norwich," said Joe, grinning. "Hello, Frank. How's the grifting?"

The grifting was good, so Frank said, and his flamboyant appearance confirmed it.

"Still following the carnivals, Joe?"

"Nope. Got a—a studio uptown." That was Joe's native caution, or perhaps you might prefer to call him a plain liar.

Frank had finished a good season. New grind down at the Island. Two shills and a good gimmick. The pay-off was a yard and a half a week, and he'd gone up to Saratoga in August and got hold of something good, and was sitting pretty—"Where you going, Joe? Sure, just going to scoff myself—"

Over the T-bones, which Frank ultimately paid for, they discussed old friends in Bridgeport and New London and Hartford, and the late tidings of Joe's old profession—the newest alliances, the partings, deaths, sudden and natural, sheriffs turned square or hostile, all the woes of the broad carnival country. Joe listened, and finally his patience was rewarded.

"Joe, you ever do any of this here, now, photostat stuff?"

Joe, who could do anything with a camera except take pictures in the dark without plates, bobbed his head.

"Well, I don't know. I think, maybe—Listen. Here. Give me a ring about nine o'clock, let's see, Wednesday night, huh?"

Joe tucked the card away—boarding house over on Eighth Avenue.

ON WEDNESDAY night, Joe called up on the stroke of nine, and fifteen minutes thereafter he was traveling across town with his paraphernalia. Frank was waiting for him, and they adjourned to Frank's room for a small drink.

"Just a photograph, a photostat, you know, of a paper, that's all. And listen, Joe. This guy is pretty leery, see. Don't ask no questions, just do what he wants. You'll get yours. I had to keep telling him you were on the up-and-up, how we went to different schools together and all. You don't want to know too much, see? Be dumb. Tell you the truth, this guy is kind of new. He thinks there isn't a guy in the world is a square shooter. He—"

"Mis-ter Higgins! Mis-ter Higgins!"

"Yes, ma'am. Send him up. Come on up, Bill."

Bill came up. A large, ponderous man about forty, with a good deal of watch chain and society emblems. His clothing was black broadcloth, and looked like the best suit of a man who had a best suit. He gripped Joe's hand and gave him the fleeting glance of a poker player.

"Hello," he said.

"H' are you, Mr. Darrell?" said Joe.

There wasn't much fuss about William J. Darrell. He closed the door, and locked it.

"You got your stuff here?"

"Sure."

"Get it ready, will you?"

Joe got it ready without words.

"Can you work in this light?"

Joe laughed and said no, but he'd fix things. Promptly Darrell pulled a sheet of paper out of his pocket and held it without unfolding it.

"Say when you're ready."

"Open it up and put it on the table."

"Not on your life," said Darrell.

"Say, Bill, have a heart, will you? This guy is right, I tell you." Darrell shrugged and opened the paper.

"Put it there on the table, Mr.—a—huh—Darrell. That's right. I should give a hoot what it is. All I want is to get it right. Yes, that's O.K."

But Joe knew what it said. An ordinary note of hand. On November 1st, John R. Black promises to pay William J. Darrell the sum of twenty thousand dollars.

John R. Black—John R. Black.

"Yeah, that'll do—just a second now."

John R. Black—William J. Darrell—William J. Darrell—John R. Black—

Blomp! and a puff of smoke. The other two coughed.

"All right, she's done. Want to watch me develop it?"

"You said it."

It turned out as Joe's work usually did. He picked up his camera.

"*Just* a minute," said Darrell. "This cover it?"

"This" was a hundred and fifty dollars, in tens and twenties.

"Cover what?"

"I'm buying your camera."

"For the love of Mike, what for?"

"Huh. How do I know but what you got more plates or something. I'm buying the works."

"Say, listen. You must be cuckoo. Know anything about cameras?"

"No, and I ain't taking any lessons, either. Is the price right?"

"The price is all right. The job'd be worth, at the outside, twenty-five bucks, and it's a holdup for that."

"All right. Now, young fellow, listen. I'm taking no chances. You ain't getting out of here with that camera, get me? If a hundred and fifty is right—"

Joe shrugged his shoulders.

"Plenty. Much obliged. Frank, I'll give you a ring—"

"Yeah, do that, Joe."

"Goodby, Mr. Darrell. That's an expensive camera you're buying."

" 'S all right. So long."

OUT INTO the streets and over to the "L." Now then. What was all this? Twenty thousand bucks to a guy like Darrell. What would it be? Had to be something phoney. Something crooked. This Darrell didn't look crooked. Never could tell. Blackmail case, some woman? Huh?

What did he want a picture of a promissory note for, when he had the note itself? John R. Black. Better write those names down now.

When he got back to the Y—oh, yes, he always roomed at the Y—he got the telephone book. John R. Black, attorney, Pine Street. Black, White & Black, attorneys, Pine Street. John R. Black, residence, Twenty—West Tenth Street. Might be anything.

And was, apparently.

"Mac, who's these attorneys, Black, White & Black?"

And Mac:

"Oh, I dunno. Let's see. West Gotham Trust people, aren't they? Yeah, that's right. Why?"

"Oh, nothing."

Slim chance of getting anything about the mysterious clients of Black, White & Black.

"Let's see that phone book again. Darrell—W—W. A.—W. E.—W. E.—W. J.—W. J.—W. J. Darrell, plumbers' supplies. Business address and home phone. Maybe that was it.

What would be a good way to find out something about W. J. Darrell, plumbers' supplies, and not let W. J. Darrell see you doing it? He wouldn't like it.

If he never saw Joe any more, that would be too soon for Darrell. Took that camera. For a fair price, yes, but would you sell a good pipe for its fair price? Look out, Mr. W. J. Darrell.

Could send some of the boys in the office up. Nix. Might be a big story in this. Why should somebody else have it? . . .

What the blazes! Joe'd try the old vacuum cleaner racket. He'd sold vacuum cleaners, and life insurance, and Old Chief Wahoo's Snake Remedy, as well as snapshots, in his day. If William J. was around, and got gay, let him look out. Tougher guys than this had taken cameras away from Joe, had hit him with blackjacks and tentstakes, and bottles, had shot at him.

Joe wasn't big, and he lacked some virtues, but not all of them.

The first chance he got, he waited upon two Mrs. W. J. Darrells, armed with a property vacuum cleaner that was easy to secure. Sold the first lady, too, and ultimately delivered the article and got the commission. But she wasn't the right one.

The second one was. She didn't want a vacuum cleaner, but Joe got inside the apartment. Ordinary Yorkville flat—who wants a description of it? Joe saw something, before he had to go, but was tactful enough not to mention it. A very fair cabinet photograph of "Box Cars" McGurk, turned to throw to first.

"All right, madam. Sorry. Thank you."

And out toward the Park . . .

Box Cars McGurk, Old Box Cars McGurk. Well, well. Box Cars, they called him, because twelve on the dice is Box Cars, just as five is Phoebe, and Box Cars was just twice as big as Big Six used to be. Supposed to be as straight as Big Six, too. Now what did Box Cars McGurk have to do with the Darrells?

IT TOOK two days—his spare time, and what he stole of the office's time, that is—to find that out. Finally thought of the right place—the marriage license bureau. William Joseph Darrell, white, Congregationalist, and Anna Mary McGurk, Roman Catholic—

Pretty soft, Anna Mary McGurk. The sister, cousin or aunt of Box Cars McGurk—sister, most likely. The celebrated, incorruptible McGurk, who was playing short for the Hyenas, and this was September twenty-fourth, and the Hyenas had the pennant cinched. Twenty thousand dollars. Not to you, McGurk—oh no, to your brother-in-law. Brother-in-law knew that when the money was paid the note would be destroyed. Afraid he wouldn't get his. Didn't trust his brother-in-law.

Oh, well, that was nature. Maybe thought that even the picture of the note might be negotiated some time, somehow. A leery guy, this Darrell—huh, had to buy cameras. Make my bed, turn out the light. Bye-bye, blackbird.

Bye-bye, honest old Box Cars. Sell the Series, would you? Not such a new idea, either. Good for you. Nobody'd ever suspect you. Just goes to show you. Nobody's straight in this man's town.

September twenty-fourth. Got to get this going soon? How?

"Mac, I got to see you. I got something—"

"What? What? Box Cars McGurk—you're crazy!"

"No, I'm not crazy. Listen—"

"Where's your proof? Where's your proof? No documents. Libel suits. Lose your job—my job— The paper—District attorney—wouldn't look at it—The judge—maybe— No story, then. Got to get some proofs, Joe. Holy Gee, old Box Cars. I remember—only a kid I was— Good scout, good to the rookies—all the newspaper boys— Only got a few more seasons left in him, I guess—Dunno. Joe. Could we work on this fellow, Darrell?"

"No, no. I tell you, Mac, I got an idea."

The day before the Series started, Joe went up to see Box Cars McGurk.

"Not at the hotel. Gone to Brooklyn. Sure, his family's there. Always travels with them. Hotel St. George."

Bumpety-bump across the bridge. The sun making headachey patterns out of the cables.

Bye-bye, Box Cars—Twenty Thousand Dollars—Mr. McGurk, I want to know about Black, White & Black— You better come clean, Box Cars—Mr. McGurk, your brother-in-law, Mr. Darrell, has squealed—Box Cars, I have in my pocket a note of hand—Box Cars, who paid you to throw the Series? It's your only chance . . .

"Here's your stop, buddy."

Hotel St. George.

"Who? Mr. McGurk? Oh, yes, 415."

Tingle-tingle.

"Yes. Who? Mr. Hawkes? Are you from the papers? Already, huh? Sure, come up."

Room 415 opens its door.

"Mr. McGurk, I'm from the Daily Picture Bulletin—"

"Sure, come in, son."

A huge man, in the sort of clothes Joe admired. What? What? His hand, his left hand—in splints—splints. Gosh, his hand—

"You don't waste much time, do you, son? I was trying to close the transom. Yeah, that one up there. It stuck. Darn thing came down on me. Greenstick fracture, Doc says. Oh, sure, that's the end of my World's Series. But I'll give you a story, kid, a good story.

"I'm quitting baseball. Quitting for good. Yep, going out West, got a farm out home. That's right. Now, get this. The Hyenas are O.K. The kid that's going in for me, Larrabie, that's right. Listen: He's got me stopped, see? I'm through, and he's still coming. Coming? He's there. Give him a good write-up. He'll open your eyes. And I'm giving you a straight tip. You bet every nickel you got on the Hyenas. It's in the bag right now."

"There's some rumors going around—" began Joe.

"I expect that's so. Let me tell you something. Whatever you hear, or have heard, this Series is straight. Straight, do you get me? Or I—or else I—well, it's straight. There's no monkey business this time."

"What do you mean—or else I? Huh? What do you mean?"

Box Cars looked levelly at Joe.

"What I said I mean. Understand?"

McGurk looked as if he had just stepped out of the showers. His big blue eyes were as clear and untroubled as a child's. But as he looked at Joe they were narrowing a little.

"And don't put that—or else stuff in your story, old kid."

"How is it you're not all shot to pieces over not playing?" said Joe.

"I told you. I'm through. I'm played out. I'm tired of it. Glad to get away from it. Glad to get back home."

"Where men are men," said Joe wearily. "By the way, how is your brother-in-law, Mr. W. J. Darrell?"

"You know him?"

"Yes, slightly. I took a picture for him once."

"Well, he's O.K. He's gone out of town. Gone on some business for some lawyer friends of his."

"Black, White & Black?"

McGurk looked at Joe.

"Yes. Black, White & Black." And Box Cars laughed, a booming laugh. "And if you want any news of my brother-in-law, I can only refer you to them. Now, if you'll excuse me, son."

"What about—" began Joe. But he thought better of it. "Much obliged, Box Cars."

"Oh, all right, son. Good luck. Don't forget. Bet your jack on the Hyenas."

INTO Fulton Street. The doctor—see the doctor. Framed his broken arm, maybe? No, that's nonsense. If they paid him to throw the series, they paid him to play in it, too. The utility short-stop was no gaping hole in the infield. Just as good or darn near it.

Can't do anything now. See what breaks— What did break? The Hyenas won the Series in six days' play. Here's

the box score for Larrabie, short-stop of the Hyenas, for the first two days.

AB	R	BH	PO	A	E
3	1	2	3	3	0
3	0	1	1	2	0

Three double plays the first day. Just as good for the balance of the Series. There was no scandal. There was no story. Joe saw the doctor and the X-ray pictures of McGurk's arm. No fake about that. He also saw John R. Black and got nowhere.

Sometimes, after that, Joe Hawkes would think of a huge brown man sticking his arm under a transom and banging it down upon his wrist. It must have taken a good husky shove to do that.

What on earth made him do it? Because he kissed his twenty thousand goodby, that's certain. If either Darrell or McGurk collected a penny, Joe didn't know the clients of Black, White & Black. Wonder whether they still had any of McGurk's guarantees? Or maybe he didn't care. Maybe he told them to go ahead and do what they liked.

Wonder if Box Cars just handed them the old doublecross to get a few bets down himself. No, Joe didn't think so. Couldn't tell. Maybe, at the last minute, Box Cars said to himself:

"I can't do it. I can't go out there and play rotten ball. I could steal, I could throw my team down, but go out and play like a ham, no. Couldn't do that."

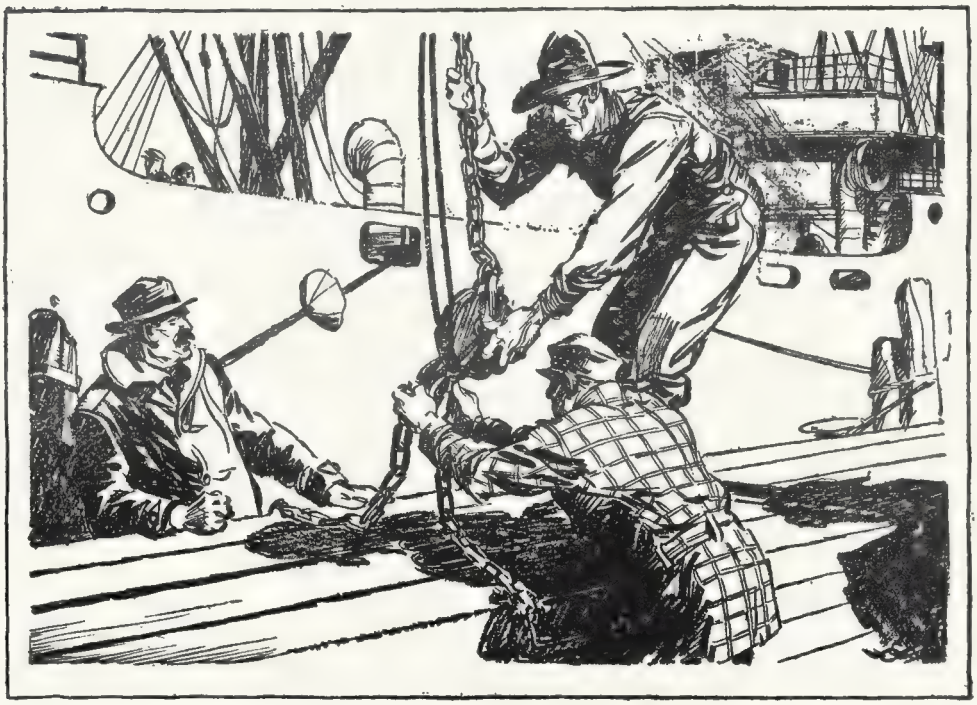
The big bum must have an artist's conscience, Joe thought. He grinned. He had a conscience like that, himself. Because, assuming that Box Cars actually was going to throw the Series, all Joe would have to do was keep his mouth shut, and bet every cent he could muster on the Prairie Dogs.

To give him his deserts, the idea never even occurred to him. He'd no more have sold his paper out than, well, than he'd have waited, with a set jaw, while a transom crunched the bones of his arm.

Differences in people are illogical, but surely not more so than their similarities are.

The BULLDOGGER

By JAMES STEVENS



A Story of the Oregon Sawmill Bully-boys

FOR SEVEN days Til Allen had stuck to the bench in the employment office. From eight in the morning until six in the evening, hour by hour, the short wiry man in the ten gallon hat sat and stared grimly at the jobs chalked on the blackboard. Whenever a new call was wired in from a sawmill or a logging camp—and that was rare in these days near to winter—Til Allen was always the first man to reach the counter.

"Ever punch a donkey engine?" the job shark would ask. Or: "Ever run an air trimmer in a sawmill?"

"You betcher!" was the snapped reply, every time.

"Like hell!" And then an experienced logger or millman would be picked from the mackinawed, calk booted crowd that drifted in all day from the streets of Portland's skidroad.

But the short wiry man in the ten gallon hat could not be rebuffed. He hung on. At last he got on the job shark's nerves.

"Say, you!" he exploded on the seventh day. "Say, why don't you go back where you come from? Don't you see it's no use to hang on here? Work's too tight.

Too many experienced lumber rasslers and loggers lookin' for jobs. Better go back to yer cows, feller."

"Back home they call me the bulldogger," said the wiry man calmly. "Try to live up to the name. Usually do. Hangin' on. That's me, Til Allen."

"Huh!" the job shark snorted. "You'll just starve."

"Starve hangin' on then."

"Well, hell!" The job shark's voice rose to a yell. "You think you'll get anything from me? Think I'd give a timber job to a blamed cow hand?"

"What are you a-callin' me?" said the wiry man gently.

"Cow hand. Think I can't tell? That horny spike of a thumb nail shows me. A rope burned cow hand. Yes, sir."

"You make it sound insultin'," said Til Allen, gentler than ever.

"Meant to," growled the job shark. "Sick of lookin' at you. Get out of my office."

"Hangin' on," said Til sweetly. "Me, I'm a bulldogger."

The job shark tramped heavily around the counter. He reached out a beefy hand for the wiry man's collar. Things happened. The job shark's head split a chair bottom as he went down. When the stars faded he discovered that his arm was clamped in a hammerlock.

"Held down five hun'erd steers in my time, more or less," said Til, sweeter than ever. "Guess I can hold you, mister. How about a job now?"

"Lemme loose," whimpered the job shark. "Lemme loose. Ow! Yeah, I'll send you to a job—honest!"

"All things come to him who bulldogs on," said Til, getting up. "I know you'll give me the worst job you got, mister, but that's all right."

The job shark had thought of it first. It happened that a call had just come in for a husky and experienced lumber handler to be sent down to the McCall Lumber Company. A man was wanted for the timber chute. Scarce though jobs were, the experienced lumber handlers were passing this one up. They knew that the McCall timber chute was the toughest place to work on the Columbia River.

"You got to be half bulldog and half mule to hold down a job on that chute," said one. "Not me."

Till Allen thought the shark was a good sport to write out a ticket for a job that paid five dollars a day, one dollar more than the going sawmill wages for common labor.

"Much obliged," said Til. "I leave you with the kindest of feelin's. This means more to me than you can know."

"There's a lot you don't know, too." The job shark said that when Til was headed for the door and out of hearing. "But you're goin' to learn, young feller, what it means for a cow hand to get fresh with the gener'l manager of a employment emporium."

ON A WET and windy November morning there was an alien figure among the men in mackinaws, slickers and calked boots who were tramping down the soggy board walks from the sawmill men's hotel to the yards of the McCall Lumber Company. Most of them were unmistakably "webfooters", as the natives of the damp green region west of Oregon's Cascade Range are called. Their faces were weathered red, but had no lines or tan from dry winds, dust and sunshine.

Til Allen, on the other hand, was unmistakably from "east of the mountains", the land of cattle and wheat. He wore a ten gallon hat and a leather coat. His belt was ten inches wide and studded with brass. His laced boots came to his knees and had no calks. The legs of his overalls were not stagged; they were stuffed inside his boot tops. Til, himself, was wiry and lean, his tan was deep and as brown as the inside of fir bark, and the lines which spread from the corners of his eyes had been made by years of squinting against dust, wind and the brilliant sunlight of an arid country. His legs were bowed, and he stalked through the yards with the stiff gait of a

man more accustomed to the saddle and the wagon seat than the ground. He had but the vaguest idea of what a timber chute was like. He inquired cautiously as to its location. At last he found it, in charge of a giant of a man called Big Jess Blaney.

The timber chute worked four men, including the straw boss. It was a trestle thirty feet high and one hundred and twenty long, topped by a line of powered steel rolls, with beams sloping down to horizontal skids which were greased for the easy sliding of the rough timbers. There were eighty feet of dock floor between the chute and the river. In this space the chute men built their loads. The straw boss explained that the smaller timbers were loaded directly from the skids, while each big one was wheeled out to its load on a two wheeled truck.

"I savvy it, I guess," said Til Allen. "Something like cuttin' out your brands in a roundup."

"What are you talkin' about?" said Big Jess Blaney, with honest curiosity.

"Cattle."

"Oh." The big webfooter nodded. "I've heard of them. You must come from east of the mountains."

"Yep."

"I'm afeard," said the straw boss, "that what you know about ranchin' won't do you much good here. Lumber is lumber, and nothin' else, and this partickler job is hell and hallelujah."

"Watch me hang on," said Til, and his mouth was a tight line.

"You seem to be one of these strong, wiry kind." But Big Jess's voice was doubtful. "If you've never rassled lumber, though—"

"I can buck wheat sacks with any man in the Grass Hills country." Til made it sound like a plain statement and not a boast. "I can out-bulldog any man back home, too."

"Yeah? What's bulldoggin'?"

"Gosh, but you webfooters are ignorant! It's rasslin' steers down. You dive off your hoss, take your steer by the horns, twist him down and hold him."

"What in thunder you want to do that for?" The straw boss looked skeptical. "Sounds fishy to me," he went on. "What man in his right mind would go out and rassle with a cow? I ask you, now."

"What man in his right mind would go out and rassle timbers like these here?" said Til.

"Why, rasslin' lumber's a job. A trade, you might say. I've done it all my life."

"And I've rassled wheat sacks and steers the same way. But we won't argy," said Til. "I just want a chance to hang on here. Just a chance to make good."

"You'll get 'er," said the straw boss. "Just don't forget you're a greenhorn here."

"A tenderfoot." Til Allen grinned, but his jaw was set. "Watch me hang on. Got to work, Mr. Blaney. Simply got to."

WORK. On the timber chute of the McCall sawmill a man soon learned what the word meant. A man soon learned there what was needed for holding down the toughest hard labor job on the Columbia River. It needed big arms and shoulders, a sound heart, a deep chest, speed in hands and feet and, above all, the skill that comes from experience in handling green lumber. Til Allen excelled in none of these qualities; he was especially lacking in the last and most important. Yet he managed to hang on throughout the forenoon. And when the five o'clock whistle boomed, he was still staggering through the drizzle from the timber burdened skids to the loads, and back again.

"Do I get another chance tomorrow?" he said weakly to the straw boss when the whistle blew.

"Bulldogger, you do," said Big Jess admiringly. "But why? It's the miserablest way of committin' suicide I know. Why don't you jump off the dock and get it over sudden?"

"Five dollars a day," said Til Allen, as much to himself as to the straw boss.

"A dollar more than for a common labor job. Got to hang on. Got to."

Jess Blaney stared solemnly at him for a moment, then shook his head in a puzzled way and tramped off for the company hotel. Til Allen leaned against a load of timbers and rested. The labor of the day pounded on in his head. *Boom—boom—boom!* Timbers thudding down from the live rolls. A yank and a heave on his end of a leaden green stick six inches thick, sixteen wide and sixty feet long. Rolling it away on a two wheeled truck. Straining himself to his toes as the big stick was labored into place on a load. His partner, Ham Nelson, growling "Greenhorn!" whenever he made a miscue. Jess Blaney yelling "Big rush! Hustle!" every ten minutes, when a pile of smaller timbers or ties would crash down the skids. His fingers and thumbs pinched by his clumsiness until every one was aching and blue. Spots of fire in his elbows and shoulder blades. A catch of sharp pain in the small of his back at every strain on the muscles there. The weak trembles in his knees. Rain down his neck. Brittle fir slivers gouging through his ragged gloves. The nerve wracking screams of the big saws in his ears. A gloomy low sky of rain clouds overhead. Work on the timber chute. Hell.

That for a man from east of the mountains anyway. Til Allen was smitten with homesickness. He gazed out over the loads of timber at the rain grayed surface of the great Columbia. A vision swept over the water and the dull green hedge of firs on the far shore . . .

A vision of rolling lands. Stubble, yellow and shining in the clear air of an Eastern Oregon autumn. The smell of black soil in fields sown to winter wheat. The sagebrush hills of the cattle range, rising in ridges toward the piney mountains. Himself trailing a bunch of beef. A pitifully small bunch—but beef. Honest, baldfaced beef, and his own . . . Trailing along . . . Sundown . . . Moonrise . . . The keen snap of frost in the dry air . . . The home fence . . . The home gate . . . Smell of coffee boiling and bacon frying . . . A light in the window of the old ranch-house where he was born . . . A voice from an opened door—a brave woman's voice . . .

Til Allen snapped himself erect. His eyes were steely gray again. His jaw was set in ridges of muscle.

"You'll hang on, Til Allen!" He jabbed a sore rib with a bruised thumb for emphasis. "Three months of hell ahead, but you're hangin' on!"

He felt like a soldier on a battlefield as he walked stiffly through the lumber stacks. Most of the sawmill men were waiting in the hotel lobby for the supper gong when he entered. Jess Blaney was there, with George Paddock and Ham Nelson, the others of the timber chute crew. They were discussing the new chute hand, this lean, wiry, sunburned greenhorn from the Eastern Oregon ranch country.

"Bet he don't last another shift," said Ham Nelson, after Til had passed upstairs to his room.

"Dunno," said the boss of the timber chute. "He's got some reason for hangin' on. Some powerful reason. And he calls hisself a bulldogger. He'll drop before he'll quit, that's what I bet."

A MONTH later Til Allen was still on the timber chute. He had not quit and he had not dropped. He was still hanging on to the toughest job. But he was wearing the marks of twenty-six days of killing labor. Lean as he had been in the first place, he had worked off six pounds of weight. The lines about his eyes had deepened. His jaw was perpetually set as he worked. The steely glitter was never gone from his eyes. By sheer nerve and determination he had hung on.

The others of the chute crew knew it. They sensed, too, that he hated the labor of handling lumber, that even the river country itself repelled him. He was an alien. Paddock and Nelson, lumber handlers all their lives, were hostile. And an instinctive hostility had developed

among the other sawmill men against the bulldogger. They saw him washing his own clothes, patching his overalls, shirts and gloves, buying the cheapest tobacco. They were aware of it when he shunned the hotel poker games.

"A hell of a guy, he is," they said. "Always knowed them east of the mountains ranchers was tightwads."

Til did not help matters any by his talk. Whenever he joined the lobby gang after supper, he could talk of nothing but his home country. Cattle and horses. Sunshine and dry air. Wheat and range grass. The free life of a horse riding rancher.

The webfooters snorted.

"What the hell you doin' over here, then?" George Paddock would roar. "Nobody invited you out of the sticks to a civilized country, did they? What the hell!"

Til Allen never told anybody—not even Jess Blaney—why he was here. When he was questioned about it, his eyes got a bleaker look, his mouth set in a grimmer line, and he made no reply. But he hung on.

Big Jess Blaney was always sympathetic and curious. To the boss of the timber chute, Til Allen was a man from a foreign country. He himself knew nothing but sawmilling in the timberlands. He felt that the wiry little bulldogger from east of the mountains would never be a timber country man. The heavy graft was breaking him down. Why was he hanging like grim death to the toughest sawmill job on the Columbia River?

"The pore cuss must need the extry money mighty bad for some reason," said Big Jess to himself, as he sized up the bulldogger in the lobby crowd on Christmas eve. "Must need it mighty infernal bad. I'd think he'd go hold up a bank first."

There was some such desperate thought in Til Allen's own mind, as he sat in a corner and watched the crowd of timber country men. Nearly all of them were rigged up in white collars, gaudy silk neckties and tailored suits. Only their muscle ridged necks, broad shoulders, bulging sleeves and large red hands gave them the appearance of workingmen. Til Allen felt conspicuous in his patched overalls, rough boots and faded wool shirt. It seemed that he was thousands of miles away from his own kind. The only talk here was of the woods and mills. Not a word about range lands and ranch fields. Suddenly he was dog tired—wornout; so homesick that he was turning weak all over. It was Christmas eve, and his first one away from the old ranch home where he was born . . .

Had to get out of this mob. In another minute he would go wild and crack Ham Nelson between the eyes. Go up to his room. Write a letter home . . .

Half an hour later, Til Allen was sitting on the edge of his bed. He was staring down at the lined page of a cheap tablet in his left hand. In his right, a stub of a pencil was clasped loosely in sliver scarred fingers. He read over again all that he had written on the first page:

> Dear Emmy and kids:
>
> Well, I hope you're having as fine a Christmas eve as I am. Only wish I was with you right now. Bound to get homesick in spite of my fine job. I'm making it fine and I'll have the money by spring so don't you worry, Emmy. How is everything? You write like all was fine but I can't help but worry some. Alton, when your ma wrote me you were roping the calves and riding them I vowed I'd lick hell out of you when I was home again, but I take it back now for a Christmas present. Only don't do it any more but mind your ma. I guess Emmy, I'll keep hanging on here, unless there's a shutdown—

He had stopped there for a spell of figuring. There was to be a shutdown for repairs that would last ten days. Jess Blaney had as much as promised that the bulldogger should have a place on the dock repair gang during that time. But it would be only a four dollar job.

Ten dollars less for the period. Til filled a page with figures. He scowled at them, he swore at them, he worked them over again, but they refused to change.

He shook his head wearily and his shoulders sagged. It was no use. He had

written in the letter that he was certain to have the money—but the figures disputed him. Till Allen felt the urge to fight on dying out of his heart. No use. His grip was breaking. Might as well give in now. This job would kill him off anyway. Go back home—there *was* a shutdown. He would not need to lie. Yeah, he could be on the old home soil by tomorrow night—and he'd have until the first of March. ght as well slide . . .

There was a knock on his door.

"Well, come in," said Til Allen, wondering who it could be.

THE DOOR opened and the big frame of Jess Blaney seemed to fill the little room. The straw boss was embarrassed. His ears were red and his gaze roved nervously over Til's head. He cleared his throat before he spoke.

"Got a chance for—uh—somebody durin' the shutdown," he said. "A tough job. Not such a hell and hallelujah job as on the chute, but a steady grind. And twelve or sixteen hours a day. Big money—ninety cents an hour for eight, then time and a half for overtime. What say?"

"Why," said Til slowly, the vision of home still on him. "I—uh—"

Big Jess glared.

"Hell, I thought you was a bulldogger! Thought you needed money for your fambly some way. Thought I was doin' you a favor. But if you're not willin' . . ."

Til Allen shut his eyes and gave his head a fierce shake. His hands clenched. Then he growled:

"Who said I wasn't willin'? I'm damn' obliged."

"All right." Big Jess was easily mollified. "It's longshorin'. River gangs are short account of Christmas week. My brother's stevedore boss here. Got two ships comin' in. He'll put you on tomorrow. Ought to make twelve a day. It'll be just for the time of the shutdown. There's a union, you know."

Til Allen looked down at the unfinished letter and at the page of figures. His heart was still sick for home. He felt all the weariness from a month of overwork. But he had to hang on. Could not loose his grip now. He forced himself into a feeling of gratitude.

"You're mighty good, Jess Blaney," he said, looking up with a grin that was forced. "I'm just writin' my wife what a fine boss I got. Yes, sir, I'll bulldog that longshorin' job, and obliged to you."

"Forget that part." Big Jess was embarrassed again. "And now come over to my room and have a seegar and a drink and tell me some more about rasslin' cows. It shore does tickle me, that idee of cow rasslin'."

"Just as soon as I finish my letter," said Til. "But it's bulldoggin' steers, I've told you a hundred times. Not rasslin' cows."

The morning after Christmas, Til Allen was out with a longshore gang among the tall stacks of lumber on the McCall cargo dock. A huge black freighter was swinging out her yellow booms. She was to load three million feet of structural timbers for New York. The longshoremen were due to earn their big money on this timber cargo.

Now, the bulldogger from the ranch country learned a new brand of hard labor. Here were no desperate rushes of work such as were needed to keep the timber chute clean. The work was a heavy, steady grind, minute after minute, hour after hour. A rope sling was stretched away from a stack on the dock floor. Til Allen and his partner swung out the weighty timbers from the stack and piled them on the sling until a load was made. For half a minute then, they could take an easy breath, until the load was hoisted. Then they stooped to the grind again.

Bend and swing over to the stack. Grab for a timber. Watch for the feel of it in your partner's hands. Yank, heave, and steer the bulky green stick into place on the sling. Swing back to the stack. On and on. Grind away. Swing and heave. Swing and heave. Only half

minute letups as you labored through the hours. That was longshoring on the cargo dock of a river mill.

The rainy season was now at its height. The sky was eternally low and gray. The thick drizzle veiled the river and grayed the forests of cedar and fir on the hills. All day little streams trickled down the oilskin backs of the men stooped at labor. Their faces were always wet and red.

Twelve hours among the timber stacks. Four in the morning. Four in the afternoon. Four after supper under arc lights which shone with misty golden rays in the slanting lines of rain. A sagging, dragging band of brawny men shambling for the hotel when the hatches swallowed their last slingloads at ten at night.

The bulldogger was half dead at that hour of the first night. He did not wait to eat from the lunch table spread in the dining room. He dragged upstairs to bed. There was no strain in his muscles from this labor. He was simply fagged out. He got his shoes off, and that was all of his undressing. He rolled over on his bed. Tired out. But his jaw was still set hard as he went to sleep. Twelve dollars a day . . . That was his last waking thought.

He hung to the longshoring job all through the shutdown. His tough, wiry body held up under the gruelling labor, though it lost another two pounds of weight. When the ship was loaded and the mill had started again, Til Allen had one hundred and twelve dollars clear from his ten days on the cargo dock.

Again he covered a page with figures, and then he wrote to Emmy that he was certain now of having the money they needed by the first of March. He would have a chance to work overtime, he wrote, as a night shift was starting in the sawmill. Certain to make it now, with the overtime. He would hang on, he guessed.

He wrote nothing to intimate what a bulldog grip it took to hang to a job on the McCall timber chute, and to work frequent half shifts of overtime besides.

"That takes a man who is half bulldog and half mule," said Big Jess Blaney, after another month was gone. "And this feller is just *all* bulldog. Just that. Not enough mule I'm afeard."

BUT IT was not until the first of March that Til Allen eased himself from a local passenger train in the Eastern Oregon town of Grass Hills. The station agent, trundling a truck along the platform, stared at him curiously, then let out a yell of surprise.

"Why, Til Allen! Where the hell you been and what the hell you been doin' to yoreself?"

"Been bulldoggin'," said Til shortly.

He tramped heavily on for the main street. The agent gazed after him, with increased curiosity. There was nothing much left of Til Allen but skin and bones. He dragged his feet. His shoulders slouched. He looked ten years older.

"Bulldoggin'!" grunted the agent. "Must of been grizzlies. Looks like he'd had the daylights licked out of him, and for good."

Til Allen tramped slowly but steadily on down the main street. He stopped at a familiar corner. The stone walls of the Grass Hills State Bank bulked before him. Behind them old Hard Cash Carlton was at his battered black desk, his eyes like gray pebbles behind their gold rimmed glasses, his mouth a thin line like a knife cut. Yep, old Hard Cash was waiting there.

Til Allen's shoulders straightened as he stared at the stone wall with the eyes of a conqueror. He stared and he remembered. Word by word and act by act, he relived his last scene with Hard Cash Carlton. That was last fall.

His grain was hauled, his seeding done, his beef was gathered; and he had plowed eighty acres for summer fallowing this year. Then he had gone to his banker and spread out his cards.

"Mr. Carlton, I hate to beg, but I got to. Got to, yes, sir. You ain't lived in this ranch country long enough to know,

to understand why I'd do anything to hang on. Well, I was born here. Out there in the hills is the only home I've ever known. Once ours was the biggest ranch in the valley. It went; all the hay lands in the bottoms, forty by forty. My dad, I don't blame him. Runnin' cattle was in his blood—strong. I know, for it's in mine. He wouldn't give up beef. Was sheeped out, and then the dry landers fenced in his summer range. Since he died I've tried to make 'er with wheat. Hung on to what was left of the old home ranch.

"You know my story well enough. Crop failures. Owe you all the ranch is worth. But I've got to hang on. Got to. The old home. Mine. Got to bring 'er back. One good year and I'll begin to pay up. Mr. Carlton, I got to beg you to see me through another year. Just got to do it."

"Business is business," said Hard Cash grimly. "But your crop's in. I aim to be fair. Have our interest—the three hundred and fifty—here by the first of March, and I'll make you out a new note."

"How can I ever get that much by then? How the hell?"

"Work."

"Work? Where? Feedin' sheep at forty a month?"

"On the Coast. Big wages in the timber. Best I can do."

"I'll try 'er," said Til. "Anything to hang on . . ."

And here he was on the first of March. Here, with a crisp draft for three hundred and fifty dollars pinned in his shirt pocket. Still hanging on. Bulldogging life for another fall.

His head was up like a conqueror's as he pushed through the swinging door of the bank. He headed directly for the short counter before the president's desk. The eyes like gray pebbles gazed up at him through gold rimmed glasses.

"Good morning, Allen. Back on time, heh?"

The bulldogger slowly drew the crisp bit of paper from the pocket of his patched shirt and as slowly slid it across the counter.

God, how it hurt him to see it go! He was caught unaware by the sudden revulsion of feeling and it hit him like a sledging body blow. All that this bit of paper meant to him, all of the straining physical labor, torment of soul and oppression of mind that had gone into the making of it, moved in a black whirl before Til Allen's tired eyes.

The life that he had lived during this winter of exile. The misery of it all. The eternally gray sky of the timber country. The eternal rain. The everlasting smell of freshly cut lumber. Screams of saws and harsh roars of machines in his ears through all the hours of heartbreaking labor. The *boom—boom—boom* of timbers sliding down the skids. The strain of yanking and heaving at the sap heavy, slivery, sharp cornered bulks of sawed logs, hour after hour, day after day. Life away from his own soil, his own blood, his own kind. An alien. A man of the ranch country an exile in the timberlands. Hell, all hell, and for this.

For this crisp bit of paper. The stubby hand of Hard Cash Carlton reached hungrily for it. It vanished from the counter, and then—

"We'll renew," the banker said.

Without another word Til Allen turned for the door. He stared into the dry, brilliant sunlight and forced the memory of the killing months out of his mind. That was done. He had bulldogged life for another fall. A new fight was ahead. Home by noon. He could get in at least five hours of plowing before dark.

His hands itched for the feel of saddle and harness leather. His heart ached for a sight of the old home hills. Yeah, home . . .

All that the heartbreaking labor of the winter meant to Til Allen now, was the new chance it had won for him to keep his home.

"Got to hang on," he said, as he headed for the hills.

Such is the love of a Western man for the soil of his birth.

Chester

MILD *enough for anybody*

What a cigarette meant there

Forty hours in the wireless room, sending, sending, sending . . . till help for a helpless ship is drawn across hundreds of miles of storm-wrecked ocean. And afterward, only one comment: "Good thing we had plenty of cigarettes!"

What a cigarette means *here*

Forty hours at the curing-barn—the most anxious hours in all the tobacco season.

The last wagon in from the fields, the barn full, the fires lighted—now the delicate work of curing commences. Day and night, day and night, watching thermometers, tending fires, adjusting ventilators—with loss of a year's work the penalty of carelessness, with loss of flavor the result of haste.

Vastly important, of course, are the later ageing and blending—but to this tireless vigil at the curing-barns you owe no small part of Chesterfield's flavorful and satisfying mildness.

Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co.

From 800 to 1,000 pounds of tobacco can be cured in this barn at each "firing."

field

. . . and yet **THEY SATISFY**

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Experience

COMRADES GRAGG AND THOMPSON, commenting on two stories by Robert Carse, ask him concerning his background for exotic fiction. Mr. Carse, at the date of this writing (February fourth) is in the Caribbean, gathering more material for stories.

I have just read your story "Jungle" in the September 15th issue of *Adventure*. I am not a literary man myself, but I believe I know a good story when I see one, and I think "Jungle" very well done; something fundamental and primitive about it.

If you have time to answer your fan mail, I wish you would write and tell me whether you have ever been in the South American jungle. Please do not take this as a covert criticism; I never saw any thicker woods than the mesquite brush in Texas. I merely want to know, as a matter of curiosity, if a man can write as realistic a story as yours without experience to supply the description.—JOHN D. GRAGG, Brownsville, Texas.

Mr. Carse's reply:

My Dear Mr. Gragg:—

Thank you very much for your letter. You ask in it whether or not I have ever been in the South American jungle. A good question.

My answer is that I have been around it, never actually in it. I've been in Puerto Cabello, and was on the Central American, Panama West Coast run when seagoing steadily and got back about a month or so ago from a flying trip down to Porto Rico as a quartermaster in the old *San Juan*. In other words, I know my tropics and my jungle, which is very much the same, anywhere from Southern Mexico down.

But I checked my stuff and got a great deal more from a very good friend of mine who has spent half his life in that exact country, and with another friend, Paul House, Curator of the Bruce Museum, who was with Beebe in Guiana.

Your criticism was not covert, but acute. Thank you for it. But, frankly, I would hardly call "Jungle" synthetic; my own actual background and personal knowledge is there. Glad you liked it.—ROBERT CARSE.

And another inquiry in respect to the saddles used by the characters in a western tale, is answered by Mr. Carse:

Your letter about my story in September 1st *Adventure* formed a small curiosity in my mind for a minute, then I figured it out. It's all in your last paragraph: "I think Mr. Carse may have meant Mexican leather embossing or carving . . . "

I have never been a puncher, but have been through the West, and have known lots of new-style and old-style punchers, Texas and otherwise. The way it was given to me was that when a Texas cowhand makes a little more *dinero* than usual he buys himself a "Mexican" saddle, which he keeps for *fiestas, rodeos* and general howdy-dos; not, of course, actual range work. Here some half dozen men who know their West—and their Texas—may have steered me wrong, for you seem to know four or five things about that country, too. If so, I'm in the wrong and freely admit it. Thanks for calling me.—ROBERT CARSE.

Two Letters From Teddy

DOROTHY ST. MARS, widow of the late F. St. Mars, wishes to sell two letters. These were written by Theodore Roosevelt, to her husband. As old *Adventure* readers know, our beloved Ex-President was a great admirer of the work of Mr. St. Mars.

Address any offers for these letters to

A. D. PETERS (Agent), 20 Essex Street, Strand, London, W. C., 2, England.

Capitalists, Attention!

OF COURSE this magazine assumes not the slightest responsibility for the worth of gold mines. Sometimes they are good—more often, not. But a letter like this might well appeal to a comrade in funds—one who was just aching to take a chance . . .

As a reader of your interesting magazine *Adventure*, I am writing to you in the hope that you will help me to find among your readers a few individuals who might be interested to finance the working of two gold mines discovered in Bolivia and Venezuela. Gold has been discovered and disposed in fair quantities by two of my friends in the State of Venezuela and there are big possibilities in working those mines. As I am associated with my friends in these mines, we need a certain amount of capital to take out Government titles and for further exploration as there are other points where diamonds can be discovered, but to work these mines on a proper scale, capital is needed. We are willing to form a company or sell the mines to any interested party who is willing to furnish sufficient capital to work the mines or to buy. As I always notice in *Adventure* where individuals are willing to risk a few dollars and enjoy the adventure, I thought it best to put my proposition before you. There is no doubt that the properties where the gold is discovered are *bona fide* and that there is gold in big quantities, but we need the capital to work. If you know of any individual who might be interested to furnish sufficient capital, he can communicate direct to me, and I shall be pleased to furnish all data. I shall be pleased to furnish full particulars to any interested party.
—F. GONYALEZ D' ARLIA, Solia a Marcos Parva, No. 40, Caracas, Venezuela, South America.

Atmosphere

GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND, whose serial of the sea—"The Roaring Horn"—received many votes in our annual contest, is now adventuring in one of the least known lands left on the face of the earth.

Let's look forward to that new story, Mr. England!

I am at San Miguel, Island of Cozumel, Yucatan, Mexico, totally surrounded by tropics, Yucatan Indians, Spanish, surf, palms, monkeys, chicle, sunshine, dugout canoes and hospitality. Flew over from Key West to Havana in a navy plane, then to Cabo San Antonio and over the dangerous Yucatan Channel to Puerto Morelos, consisting of a few nipa shacks, a handful of Indians, a mule and three dogs. There the *U. S. S. Sandpiper* took me aboard, and after a while transferred me to *U. S. S. Quail*, which brought me to Cozumel. Expected to be slaughtered on the beach, but instead was met with the greatest enthusiasm, as an "*embajador de la buana voluntad.*" I am trying to live up to it, and look dignified with only two shirts and a toothbrush to maintain my prestige . . .

This letter is being hacked out on a machine that Montezuma used as an anchor for one of his war dugouts in 1514. Have already seen a Maya idol, and shall get to the ruined temples in a few days. Many Indian faces here are exact replicas of the Maya carvings. Original Maya language still spoken. This place beats anything I have ever yet seen for color and the tang of the remote. How it has escaped being exploited till now, is a mystery. Me for Mexico, especially Quintana Roo. This is the real thing, and then some! Feverishly,—ENGLAND.

Wyatt Earp: 1849–1929

HOW 'BOUT IT, CHIEF, yuh got a place for a real good man? An' mebbe a task for guts an' grace—a straight-shootin' gent without a mask—guardin' yore angels' caravan?

Frozen To Death

ONE VERY HOT August afternoon, at Prince Rupert, British Columbia, I went into the freezing rooms of a Skeena River salmon cannery. Here the fish were dipped in water, hung up or piled like so many fagots, dipped and frozen again and again until they were covered with ice about one-half inch thick.

The temperature outdoors was about ninety; indoors it was ten below zero Fahrenheit. I stayed inside only fifteen or twenty minutes; but on gaining the outdoors again I found my face as stiff as a mummer's mask. It took several minutes to thaw out that set expression.

Here a comrade questions a point in a story by Frank R. Pierce—the latter a native of the North country.

In the 15th of September number of *Adventure* you have a story entitled "The Winner" by Frank Richardson Pierce, where a policeman trying to overtake the villain in certain cold regions of Canada, is found frozen with his gun pointed at the villain, who is about one hundred yards away frozen in his position sitting in front of a fire he had built. This resembles very much the pictures we see once in a while of petrified mummies discovered in some remote lands or even in our own country; but unfortunately the processes are different. The popular idea is that when a man is frozen to death he is found later on in the position which he adopted last. As a matter of fact this is possible only when the victim's last position was one in which he was completely relaxed, either sleeping or couched, but not one in which he is seated in front of a fire with his arms extended, or lying on his stomach with his gun pointed in a certain direction.

The only possibility would be that both the men were wet by the rain, and due to the heavy cold they became coated with a thick layer of frost, which held them in their positions as they died. Men who suffer the "cold death" feel a drowsiness overcoming them and lose all their strength just as if they had been doped, and lie down immediately in what is known as the "slumber of death"—because they never get up again. If the man in front of the fire suffered the "cold death" his arms would have dropped down and he would have flopped on top of the fire he built, in which case he would have either been stirred up or moved away from the fire.

As to the mounted policeman, as an expert he should have known that when you are getting the "slumber of death" you should never lie down, but keep on moving.

From every respect, as you see, the author is not very accurate in his facts, although his story is true to popular belief and he would naturally appeal to people who are not better acquainted with such conditions.—WILLIAM H. OETERS.

The reply by Mr. Pierce:

Your letter of September 28, 1928, relative to my story, "The Winner", was referred to me by *Adventure* for reply.

There is so much logic in your letter that I was impressed as well as very much interested. I believe it is a situation that can lend itself to considerable argument, such as whether cougars scream; brown bears are dangerous or Northern Lights "crackle".

However as fifty percent of my story is based on fact I feel I should stick to my guns and at the same time produce further facts. The story was built around an incident in which a man was found squatting before a fire, frozen. The fire had evidently died in the making and he was attempting to warm his hands sufficiently over the scant coals, to whittle more shavings.

Jake Kline, known to thousands in the early days as "Jake the Musher", carried mail to Dawson and spent considerable time on the trail. He is the man I turn to when in doubt about any phase of trail or sled dog life. Three incidents come quickly to his memory.

First, a man was found frozen sitting on a log.

Second, a musher broke through to his waist in an overflow. He caught an object on the bank and attempted to drag himself out. Too weak to do so he froze and was found clinging to the object, dead.

Third. Jake, mushing on one occasion, was surprised to see a four horse team and sled hold the trail instead of turning out. He managed to drag his sled and hold it at an angle until the team passed. During this he said enough to the driver to make any man fight. The man continued in an upright position, mitted hands on the lines, driving. On his return hours later Jake stopped at the next road house and inquired who the driver was who had taken up so much trail. He was informed that the horses, following habit, had pulled up to the road house and stopped. Those present, wondering why the driver did not come in, stepped out and found him frozen solid.

The above are all facts and yet one can not but be impressed by the logic in your contention that a period of relaxation precedes death.

Appreciatively yours,

—F. R. PIERCE

"It's An Old Spanish Custom!"

(Will Rogers)

SORRY THAT these two excellent authors, Newsom and Surdez, could not meet just at this time. But their boats passed in mid-ocean—Surdez going back to Africa, while Newsom was on his first visit to America, in many years.

However, I'm looking forward to many tales from both their pens.

It is my tough luck that the first thing which I told you I would do was not done. I had J. D. N.'s address with many other papers in the metal case of my standard size typewriting machine.

The Spanish customs in Barcelona grabbed the machine and demanded payment of two hundred odd pesetas, money in any language, for its release. I kicked like a mule, saying it was merely in transit, tried to use the American Consul, who could not do anything as it was held legally, and finally, with the assistance of a friend, Admiral Pachner, finally arranged to have it held at the customs until my departure from Spain.

Meanwhile, they would not allow it to be touched, or permit me to remove from within the case any document therein contained. So I was helpless. Further, they seized my revolver, and it is now held by the Civil Guard, pending further negotiations. When I left Barcelona, on a tramp steamer, to cross the Mediterranean, I was escorted from the customs to my boat by a husky *carabinero* (bearing arms and boots) who stood watch over the machine until we pulled out. So what could I do?

I'll probably run up to Paris this spring some time, only three days away—and fulfill my promise. Having a great time, naturally. Will have some interesting material for Camp-Fire before long.

Best of luck,

SURDEZ

Villa René, 3 Rue Victor Vassal, Eckmuhl, Oran, Algeria.

And just as Camp-Fire was about to go to the composing room, along came some of the promised material. I am mighty glad to pass along this material concerning the Legion:

The Foreign Legion intends to raise a monument to its dead. This monument will be designed by the Legion, erected by the Legion, which means it shall be well done.

It will honor all the brave men who died according to the motto inscribed on the flag of the Legion: "Honor and Fidelity". For those who fell everywhere throughout the near century of the famous unit's existence: Algeria, Kabylia, Spain, Crimea, Italy, Mexico, France, Tonkin, Madagascar, Oranese South, Morocco, Macedonia, Syria, in the World War.

Better than most do I know that Americans honor courage, fidelity and the spirit of adventure wherever found. The good reception granted by readers to my stories of Frenchmen is a fine proof. It is also a fact that no matter what race, what blood, a man may be, that race and that blood shall be honored by the monument to the dead of the Legion.

Not many hours ago, in the Honor Room of the Legion at Sidi-bel-Abbes, Lieutenant Meroli showed me, among the multitude of trophies, the Golden Book of the Foreign Legion during the World War. Listed with men of all the nationalities of the Earth were seventy-one Americans. Among them was Allan Seeger. Thus, Americans contributed their share of blood for the glory of the Legion.

Will not their countrymen remember them?

I am acting on my own initiative. But as an American on the spot, is it not my duty to inform those at home?—GEORGES SURDEZ, Villa René, 3 Rue Victor Vassal, Eckmuhl, Oran, Algeria.

Last Word On "Bullets"

BY A LARGE VOTE, Mr. Elston has been upheld in his use of "bullets"—meaning rifle or revolver cartridges. Of course this is a localism, but plenty men used it. Here is one correspondent who backs up Mr. Elston.

"Hyah, son! Take them bullets outa that gun if you're gonna play with it"—how many times have I heard that? Allah alone knows but anyhow the number was of a sufficiency to fully corroborate Mr. Allan Vaughan Elston in the controversy, or what is it, in our *Adventure* of January fifteenth.

Some of my folks "moved in" about forty miles south of this village in the late *'60's*, herding twenty odd yoke of oxen coupled to the front end of one of those covered wagons we read about now and again. They had bullets in their hand-guns and bullets in their rifles—and Uncle Jim Conlow, to the day of his death about ten years ago still called cartridges, bullets.

And not only the old-timers use this term. For several years, I rode for the H. O. P. outfit in the Chico country—about fifty miles, airline, from the terrain where "Table Stakes" were played. There were even in my riding days up to wartime, some wolves abroad in the land, not to mention coyotes by the hundreds. Thus came the orders from the boss: "You boys take plenty *bullets* along and see can you get you a wolf or two."

The home ranch house at the H. O. P. is sod. Outside walls four feet thick: partition walls, two feet of the same material, and the building has been standing since 1871. When doors are closed between rooms, with the blankets dropped in front of them, the shot of a .38 Army Colt is but faintly audible outside the room in which the gun is fired. Now sod and 'dobe are twins except for the fact that 'dobe is packed tighter, and is a better insulator.

As to the "firing pin" episode I have in my possession a single action .45 Colt, seven-and-one-half-inch barrel, the firing pin of which is so worn from abrasion on copper and brass shell caps that it no longer explodes the cartridge. An old gun, true; but give me a small piece of sandpaper—to say nothing of most any kind of a hacksaw blade—and I'll fix a new gun so that its firing pin will not function.

And anyhow, on all these arguments about minutiæ of detail—what of it? So long as the tale is en-

tertaining and not too far out of character. Kipling remarked, via some old Hindu fakir, "A tale is true as long as the telling thereof"—or words to that effect.

This is my second offense in many years of *Adventure* reading—not counting an attempted essay on D'Artagnan—so at least I am consistent in my promise that the over critical reader cannot get the depth of enjoyment or perspective of pleasure from a story, that the fellow gets who don't care a hoot whether Murderous Mike mounts his Belching Stallion from the off or the near side—so long as he *mounts* him and gets into action! —HARRY R. GALBRAITH, Box 486, Colorado Springs, Colo.

Prehistoric Agriculture

DID THE AMERICAN Mound Builders—ancestors (perhaps) of the red men Columbus found in possession of North America—till the soil with these implements? Or were plows brought to this country by Europeans? Comrade J. W. Norwood, managing editor of the *Market Growers' Journal*, raises the question:

Comrades: Pardon the intrusion while more interesting conversation is forward; information is wanted on what seems to be a rather new feature of Americana—much to my surprise, too, after reference to quite a number of authorities.

Has any one run across the stone plow of the aboriginal Americans—or at least the prehistoric Americans? Only two such have come to my notice, and those within recent years, but they seem to indicate a very much greater knowledge of the plowman's art than any other part of the world, until very modern times. Reference to Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Scandinavian, British, Japanese—to mention specific cases—ancient stone, wood and metal plows, and pictures of them, reveals nothing like the two above mentioned.

Both were found in the Ohio River Valley, home of the Mound Builders, and other mysterious peoples of the past. The first, found in Pennsylvania, is undoubtedly a regular mouldboard plow—the mouldboard not being "invented" in Europe or America until almost the beginning of the nineteenth century, if the encyclopædias are to be relied upon.

The second plow could turn back the soil too, and did so, judging from the worn places on the handlebar side which twisted the stone plowshare to the left—but it was not a mouldboard. This was found in Kentucky on land still cultivated in vegetables by modern truck gardeners.

What interests me most is that our experts on American archæology apparently have little or no knowledge of the use by ancient Americans of this most important agricultural implement. Of flint and stone hoes and spades there are an abundance in public and private collections. Neolithic man in the Ohio River Valley at least, where I am best acquainted, seems to have left behind him plenty of stone, flint, shell, bone and even wooden relics that parallel those of other countries—except in the instance of plows! Here the American may have been the first inventor.

Or it may be possible that migrations from Europe or Asia brought the plow with them. But I find nothing at all like these American implements even remotely suggested in the crude "forked stick" idea that is said to have originated with the Egyptians. America probably used the forked stick too—but with real stone points, plowshares and even mouldboards! No work animals appear to have been possessed by any Ohio River Valley peoples, so the implication is that slaves (prisoners) or women drew these plows.

If any one at Camp-Fire can give me further information it will be much appreciated.—J. W. NORWOOD, 2115 Maryland Ave., Louisville, Kentucky.

REPLY by Mr. Arthur Woodward, of the Museum of The American Indian.

The editor of *Adventure* has passed on to me your letter of inquiry regarding the stone implements found in the Ohio Valley and described by you in your communication to Camp-Fire.

As you surmise there is no reference to the use of the plow in North America by the aboriginal inhabitants for this reason, to date, as far as I know, there has never been found any authenticated implement of that nature. Furthermore, prior to the coming of the Europeans and at the time of contact during which period the newcomers noted everything of interest, there is no reference to the use of such implements by the Indians. We learn from eye-witnesses that the tribesmen used shell, stone, bone and wooden digging implements, but not one of those early chroniclers mentions a regular plow.

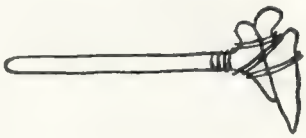
Now, No. 2 of your "ploughs" greatly resembles, as far as I can determine from the sketches, a type tool known to archæologists, and which have been seen in use among certain tribes within the historic period, as an adze.

Now here is another thought for you. You have already searched the references and found no definite mention of the use of the plow in North America. Likewise these two tools which you designate as plows, are the *only ones* that have come to your attention. Archæologists do not like to build up a theory from one or two isolated examples of specimens. In other words, the evidence in these two pieces, found in different spots is not sufficient to carry the weight of the plow in aboriginal America. It is easy to play with fancies and fascinating to guess at probable uses of certain tools, but not quite scientific.

Archæologists have reached a point where guessing in earnest is taboo. Now the specimens discovered must check with early descriptions or be

found in such positions or condition as to leave little or no doubt as to their usage or meaning.

There are many little problems in archæology which are enigmas to students in that science. The hook stones from the Channel Island region of



southern California; the bird stones of the Ohio Valley and points East; the banner stones, butterfly stones, certain types of "doughnut" stones; the cogged wheel stones from California, and others. As yet we have no definite information on these objects. In all probability unless some lucky find is made showing these items hafted or *in situ* whereby accurate deductions may be made as to their usage, chances are the mystery surrounding them may never be solved.

Even some of the most simple objects found were sometimes put to various uses other than those ascribed to them. There was the instance of an ethnologist collecting from some tribe or other, I cannot recall the name, and in the course of his collecting tour he obtained from one Indian a series of bone awls, ranging from a very fine small one to a heavy one. The Indian indicated the use of all of them. This was for moccasins, this for tent making, this for clothing, etc., until they were all classified except the last one.

"And this one?" asked the ethnologist.

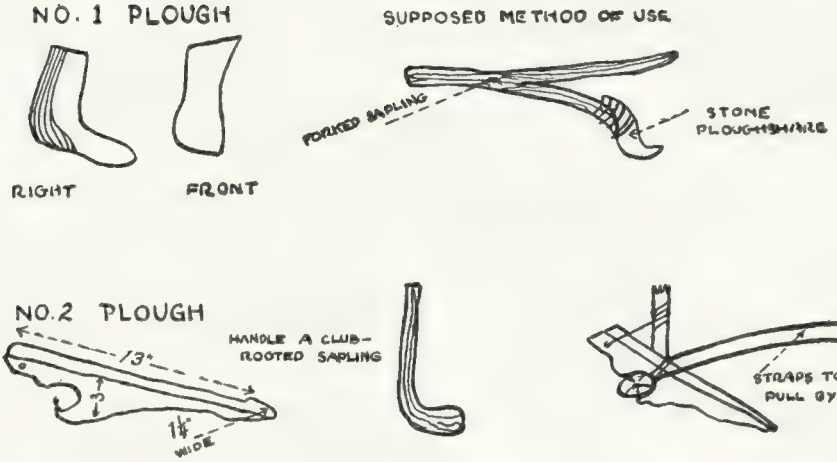
"Him, tooth pick," was the reply.

So it may be seen that awl is not what it may seem, at least from general appearance.

I realize I have not told you much. But then, there isn't much to tell. Personally, I would doubt very much that these implements were used as plows, *unless* they happened to have been so used by Indians *after* the coming of the whites. This has often happened. Old stone implements found by the Indians on the sites occupied by their ancestors have been picked up and put into use, often in a different manner than that probably intended by their forerunners. In Mexico certain tribes use rude wooden plows with either wooden shares or crude iron ones.

However, these are post-conquest innovations.

—ARTHUR WOODWARD.



Semi-Pro

WHEN A STRICTLY amateur athlete runs in many track meets before huge crowds, plays tennis in the stadium at Forest Hills, Long Island, or fills Soldiers' Field, Chicago, because of his brilliant showmanship as a football fullback, why in the world should he *not* make a moderate living, writing about this sport that he knows? Especially since this writing tends to further the healthy and blessed lesson of competitive athletics. Commercial hypocrisy has me a little disgusted.

I'd like to hear from comrades both here and abroad. But it does seem to me that the world is all ready and set for another classification—something between "gentleman" and "professional".

I suggest "semi-pro"—or "*man*"!

—ANTHONY M. RUD

ASK Adventure

For Free Information and Services You Can't Get Elsewhere

Grand Banks

SOME facts about the fishing business.

Request:—"I am writing to ask you some questions regarding the fishing industry on the Newfoundland Banks.

1. What is the usual size and type of vessel used by the Banks fishermen?

2. What is an approximate net yearly earning of such a vessel and how many men comprise her crew?

3. How much capital would it require to purchase a used fishing vessel and equip her for use?

4. Do the Banks fishermen run in to market at short intervals or do they salt and store the fish aboard the vessel and stay at the fishing grounds the entire season on one trip out?"—CHARLES H. LEWIS, Sapulpa, Okla.

Reply, by Mr. C. T. James:—1. Schooners employed range from 80 to 100 tons net, and are fore and aft rig, carrying mainsail, foresail, jumbo, middle and flying jibs: sometimes fore and main gaff topsails and maintopmast staysail, with riding sail for stormy weather.

2. The season's earnings depend on the results of the voyage. One can not say offhand the value of a trip, but from 500 to 1000 quintals, according to size of vessel, would be a good catch. Prices vary according to demand. Maybe $6 per quintal of 112 pounds, dry cured, would be an outside rate. Crews run from 12 to 24 men.

3. Have no idea. Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, or Gloucester, Mass., would be the proper places to apply for this information.

4. Fishermen on the Newfoundland Banks remain out until they have used up what is known as a baiting, when they return to port, discharge the catch for dry curing, take a fresh baiting and ice supply and sail for the grounds. Thus two or three or more trips are made in a season, March to October.

State Police

REQUIREMENTS for joining the New York State force.

Request:—"Kindly tell me how to join the State Police and chances of advancement, etc."

—BILL M. RYDE, New York, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Francis H. Bent:—Applicants of the New York State Police must be citizens of the U. S.; between 21 and 40 years of age; at least 5 feet 8 inches tall, without shoes; weight at least 140 pounds, stripped; show an honorable discharge from Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or National Guard; be a practical horseman.

Write to the Superintendent, Division of State Police, Executive Department, Albany, for application blanks. When these are filled out and sent in, accompanied by a chauffeur-size photo taken within three months prior to the application, they will be passed on. Following this, you will receive notice when and where to report for examination.

Physical examination is very rigid. Mental examination is of general character to show applicant's education and intelligence. If you pass these examinations, you will be assigned to the school troop at Troy.

Pay for the first year is $900. There is an increase of $100 per year for each year served up to the fourth year. The State furnishes board, lodging, uniforms and equipment. If a man is disabled in line of duty he receives a pension amounting to not less than one-third pay, not more than one-half pay. If killed, his dependents receive the same amount.

Non-commissioned officers, of course, receive higher pay in accordance with their rank. Chances for promotion to the higher ranks are not very good, although for a man who wishes to stick and work, there is a chance.

Polynesia

THE cradle of a dying race. White civilization that cured by killing.

Request:—"I have read London's, O'Brien's and Martin Johnson's books, but as they are from ten to twenty years old, they do not give up-to-date facts concerning the South Sea Islands and their people.

1. Are the natives of the Society and Marquesas Islands becoming extinct?

2. Can you give me the population of each of these groups?

3. Have the Solomons been settled by whites or are inhabitants still cannibals and head-hunters?"

—EDWARD A. WEIGEL, Chicago, Ill.

Reply, by Mr. James S. Meagher:—1. The day is not far distant when it will be difficult if not impossible to find a Marquesan or Society Islander of pure Polynesian ancestry remaining in the islands. This may sound like an extreme statement, but it is nevertheless true. The "White Shadows" which Frederick O'Brien speaks of in his book, written a few years ago, are today deepening into darkness for the native race.

The advent of the white man and ways of civilization have from the time the first discoverer landed on the Island shores, proved to be the death knell of the native. Despite their once glorious physique and the absence of disease before the coming of the white, the people have fallen easy victims to the ills and diseases of civilization. No group of Islands has suffered from these conditions as have the Marquesas, "Land of the Warfleet!"

The Societies are little better off and there are only a few places left where the Polynesian has any chance to survive. Perhaps Samoa and a few outlying isles.

The recent influenza epidemic reached the South Seas as well as other countries and carried off its quota. The whites and other foreigners were not affected, but if you happened to be in Tahiti a year ago and went back now, you would be bound to miss some of the splendid types of old Tahiti, who have in the short space of a year passed away. They are so few they are easily missed. They are like children in many ways. Not knowing how to take care of themselves or to meet the exigencies of the new conditions, their case is indeed a sad one. As time passes this condition must become more acute and perhaps in this generation the true Tahitian and Marquesan races may pass away entirely.

2. The population of the Society Islands is about 15,000. Of these about four per cent. are white and about ten per cent. Chinese. Most of the remainder are classed as natives but they are nearly all half castes. I would estimate that there is not five per cent. of these of pure Polynesian ancestry.

The population of the Marquesas is about 1900, possibly less at the present time. The natives are mostly of the half caste variety. Just a few Marquesans left.

The land is protected for the natives as a general rule in the French Islands, but can be leased and bought in Tahiti. Most of the land which is sold or has been sold in recent times has been developed into plantations, most of which are small. Papeete, Tahiti, the island metropolis, has been variously estimated at from 4000 to 8000 inhabitants but the official count is 5569. Whites are principally officials, merchants and professional men, while the Chinese are laborers, clerks, farmers and merchants. The Chino is the commercial boss of the place. The natives, such as are left today, still derive their living from the sea and the soil.

The natives are nearly all contaminated with one disease or another and the newcomer is lucky to leave Papeete without contracting some of them, if he has sojourned there for any length of time.

The laws of France are in effect and order is well maintained as a general rule. The climate is tropical and somewhat enervating at times and rain is almost constant in the wet season. The average humidity is 78 and maximum and minimum shade temperatures run from 56 to 95 degrees. The Society Islands and Marquesas are practically free from tropical fevers but some cases are met with from time to time.

3. The Solomon Islands Protectorate is being wrested from savagery but slowly, and the inhabitants are savage and fierce, especially in remote inland villages, where they have come but little in contact with white men.

There are many types of natives in the Solomons, from Polynesian to the blackest and wooliest Melanesian, and languages are almost as great in number and difference as there are tribes on the islands.

As far as cannibalism is concerned, if it takes place in remote places it is concealed as far as possible, for fear of "Big Government." The custom is now rare however in comparison to its prevalence but a few years ago.

Despite the above conditions, coconut plantations are increasing and the copra output is becoming an important factor in South Sea trade. The number of whites in the group is small all told, however.

Owing to the operations of "blackbirders" the natives are still distrustful of whites and hands for plantation work are difficult to obtain. The system as well as creating this distrust among the natives also reduced the supply of labor, so that the usual importation of Asiatics is the remedy for the labor situation.

The Solomons are islands where life and conditions are still of the most primitive kind. The climate has many of the drawbacks of the tropics and is usually very enervating to white men.

Fevers such as malaria are prevalent, and many whites do not last very long in the dark jungles and white beaches of the wild Solomons.

Ducks

A COUPLE of suggestions on "leading" them.

Request:—"I take a great interest in duck hunting. Now what I wish to know is, how much to lead the blamed things. How about canvas-backs, mallards, sprigs, blue bills and all ducks of about that size—could you give me the lead of 100 to 150 ft? I have two guns, a 12 gage, 30 in. barrel double, Ithaca, and a 12 gage 30 in. Browning auto. I get about two ducks out of every 5, and I shoot from a sink box. Where I miss most of my shots is with ducks coming straight over. I can't get the lead.

The season is closed here now, but I sure would like to have a little help for next time."

—R. E. CHAUSSE, Aberdeen, Wash.

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—While I have been shooting ducks for nearly forty years, I hesitate very much telling anyone how much, in actual feet, to lead them. The difference in speeds and distances prevents such information from being of any value. My success is swinging with them and getting ahead of them until I can see plenty of daylight, even at long distances, between my sight and the duck, and then I press the trigger, and never stop my swing, permitting the recoil to do that. If you try to stop it at a certain number of feet of lead, you are surely going to jerk the trigger and miss.

Like yourself, I shoot an Ithaca.

Ducks coming straight over me I handle as incomers. I hold right on them, gradually shoving my left hand forward on the fore end, which automatically brings a lead and the instant I lose sight of them, I press the trigger. This is not very difficult and I will kill on an average about ninety-eight per cent. in this way out of a hundred. It is almost an automatic manner to kill ducks.

Centessimi

DURING the middle ages, little attention was paid to small currency, minor transactions being carried on by barter.

Request:—"In early Italian coinage, I understand there was a very small coin named Centessimi, perhaps the smallest in that coinage. Now, I would like to know the name of the corresponding coin extant in the XIIIth century. I understand that the one I have named is of a later vintage."

—JOHN PRESTON TRUE, Waban, Mass.

Reply, by Mr. Howland Wood:—The Centessimi is of recent origin and came in with the decimal system. It is the smallest value coin of modern Italy. There is no corresponding coin of the 13th Century; outside of Sicily and parts of Southern Italy, copper was not at that time minted. The smallest coin, minted only occasionally, was the half-obol or quarter-denier, a silver or base silver coin. Its exact purchasing power I do not know. In Southern Italy there was a copper coin used known as a follare, sometimes made in fractions.

As a rule, in the early Middle Ages and Middle Ages little attention was paid to the currency for very small transactions; probably barter was employed. For the most part, the silver denier, roughly corresponding to the English silver penny, was the only coin. Still later, gold coins were made, usually of the size and weight of what later became the ducat, which had a value of a little over $2.00.

Herpetological

A COUPLE of snake myths and a snake by no means so mythological.

Request:—"1. Do you know of any snake, either in this country or abroad, that will get milk from a cow?

2. Is there such a snake as the hoop snake, one that takes its tail in its mouth and rolls after a person?

What is the most poisonous snake in the world? Is there an antidote? How long does it take for the poison to act?—PAUL H. JESTER, Camden, N. J.

Reply, by Mr. Clifford H. Pope:—1. There is no snake known to science that is properly constructed to extract milk from a cow. The "milk snake" myth is very widespread in America and many farmers believe it as firmly as they do anything. A snake of ordinary size, if it did live on milk would not consume enough to make an appreciable difference in the output of a healthy cow.

2. The "hoop snake" story belongs to the same category as the one about the milk snake. No snake even has a habit suggestive of that attributed to the hoop snake.

3. It is hard to say which snake is the most poisonous. Some are very poisonous but not as *dangerous* as less poisonous species, i. e., they are unable to get the venom into a victim as well because of a less efficient poison apparatus or milder temperament. However, the poison of the cobras is very toxic and one species, the King Cobra, is extremely active and aggressive. Moreover, it is the largest poisonous snake on earth. There are records of death from Cobra bites in 15 minutes, and the average length of life after a good bite is but 2 hours. The King Cobra has few if any rivals in its ability to destroy human life.

Submarine Salvage

AFTER the voluminous newspaper comment on the subject of the late S-4 disaster, it is interesting to read a Navy man's opinion.

Request:—"1. Would it be possible for a ship to raise a sunken submarine high enough in the water to allow the escape of her crew?

2. Could this be accomplished in water of any

great depth by the aid of a diver and ordinary means of a vessel not specially equipped with means for rescue work?

3. What method would very likely be employed in a job of this kind?

4. Are trained divers usually carried on board U. S. Navy ships other than battleships?

5. If so, how are they rated, designated or distinguished?

6. What qualifications are necessary for this work?"—WILLIAM H. FARMER, Washington, D. C.

Reply, by Lieut. F. V. Greene:—1. It would not be possible in the case of an ordinary ship without special equipment. It could be done with floating cranes in the case of a very small submarine. There are none so small in the U. S. Navy. To do a job of this sort, however, the weather would have to be very calm. If there should be any sea running the cables of the crane which were being used for hoisting purposes would be jerked by the rolling of the cranes and very quickly parted.

2. No.

3. The same method is used by all Navies, pontoons in the shape of steel cylinders are sunk alongside the submarine, cables are passed under the hull, the pontoons are then cleared of water and when they float they bring the submarine to the surface.

4. There is no particular order as to which vessels divers shall be carried aboard of. They are carried wherever they may be detailed for duty.

5. A diver may be a man of any rating, the diving part is an extra qualification.

6. To be a diver a man must be a graduate of the Naval Deep Sea Diving Class.

A man employed in diving (not under instruction or diving for practice) receives extra pay at the rate of $1.20 per hour for the actual time so employed under water.

In the matter of submarine salvage, one should pay no attention to what appears in newspapers about the matter. By reading various articles about submarine accidents, and from my own knowledge of the same, I have come to the conclusion that accuracy means nothing to newspapers. I noted that when the USS S-4 was sunk, news reports used as an example of quick rescue an account of a German submarine that was sunk and the crew of which was rescued in a very short time. The quick rescue was true, but no paper explained that this particular submarine was sunk in the harbor of Hamburg in 40 feet of water, and that she sank in a slanting position with one end above water. This made rescue very easy. The same thing was done with one of our submarines in Panama a few years ago. I have an account of another German submarine here which sank at sea in over 100 feet of water. This vessel was raised in three months by the pontoon method, with all the crew dead, just as ours were.

When the Italian submarine F-14 was sunk August 6th, this year, news reports here said that an air line was attached to the vessel at once and that telephone communication was established at once. When the boat was raised about 36 hours later the crew was dead. If the air line had been connected as the papers stated the crew would have been alive when she was raised. A good supply of fresh air being forced into the compartment where the men were and with an exhaust valve opened by the men inside, they would certainly have been alive.

This is not intended as derogatory to the Italians; they have a good Navy and all was done that was humanly possible in this case, but, the Italians are only human beings, and could do no more than is possible with this sort of work.

The reason for the submersible being raised so quickly is that the sinking happened just outside a Naval station, where all apparatus was available at once, the weather was not bad, and the water was warm. Besides, the submarine was a very small one, her submerged displacement was 318 tons as compared with 1,092 tons of the USS S-4. This Italian submersible was raised by the pontoon method, as is always done.

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They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

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